DRUID MAGAZINE

On Being an American Druid

SUMMER/ FALL 2017

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DRUID MAGAZINE

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1.

From the Editor's Desk...

Renu K. Aldrich

Welcome to Druid Magazine!

Dear readers,

We hope this issue finds you strong in determination to live your Druidry in the face of the current political unrest or any other challenge. We bring you several articles under a common theme of resistance and protection. Many focus on land healing, while others speak directly to the inner core of the individual.

We start with a special tribute to the newest American Druid camp, the Mid-Atlantic Gathering of the United States (MAGUS). There is true strength in our communities, and MAGUS provided us with the space and time to connect amidst the breathtaking standing stones of Four Quarters InterFaith Sanctuary. I was deeply honored to be their special guest, facilitating a workshop on how to kindle your spiritual warrior. To know right action, first drill down to the inner fire to see where it leads. We can align our Druidry not just with our mundane lives, but have it energize our personal misson in life—whatever that may be.

Dana O'Driscoll, who conducted a ceremony to protect threatened hemlocks using a combination of Galdr and Wassail/ tree magic, provides a Druid's guide to healing the land within and without. While Dean Easton invites us to kindle sacred fire, Wanda C tempts us to awaken our sensuality. Ambrose not only shares his magnificent Beltane Petition that he offered at the MAGUS main ritual, but he also gives us peek at his Druid journey in his essay, The Awakening of a Mid-Atlantic Druid, for the On Being An American Druid section.

Michael R. Gorman provides advice on handling conflict through some of his own history with "Witch wars." Sarah Fuhro graces our pages with a look at Yarrow, the flower of protection, and later explains how Druidry winds through her life like the Honeysuckle vine in Druidry in the Workplace.

Also in this issue, I profile the only Pagan news reporting agency, The Wild Hunt. After writing the story, I joined their team as a reporter to help expand this kind of balanced and fair insider coverage of our world because spreading insight and awareness is part of my spiritual warriorhood.

Continuing this theme of how

to sync Druid values with advocacy, Gail Nyoka reminds us to consider the powerful role of the storyteller to challenge dictators. Her words are beautifully illustrated by the two evocative poems that follow in Voices of Awen: Avellina Balestri's A Bard's Prayer and *The Song That Never Sleeps*.

David North concludes his two-part interview of OBOD's main Bard, Pendragon Damh the Bard in this issue. Damh speaks about how his music connects with his social and environmental activism and touches on the future of OBOD. Some are calling for Druid organizations to become more politically active. Both OBOD and ADF did issue statements affirming their support for diversity following the Charlottesville, VA riots last month.

Activism can take many forms. Moss Magill and North both offer useful guides and tips for public workshop facilitations. In Practical Druidry, Moss offers excellent tips and tricks for facilitation, including on establishing ground rules to ensure safety and success. At the end of his five-part series in Ritual Space, North discusses magical safety and security in his workshop on ritual voice. In her Healthy Ways column, Shelley Keneipp touts the wisdom of taking Vitamin C in its many forms as a defense against many ailments and diseases. Lolly Nicol seeks to protect the planet with her tips on reducing, recycling, and reusing in Conscious Living. Marie Fill and Robert MacPherson join our amazing photo contributors team, offering stunning work throughout this issue that beautifies as they inform.

We hope we have given you multiple threads to follow on pathways that speak to you. Please let us know how you incorporate Druidry into your life. Meanwhile, I will see some of you at the upcoming East Coast Gathering!

Brightest blessings,

Renu /|\

PRACTICUM

For a 24-hour period, refrain from using all digital technology during a time such as the weekend when you need it the least. This includes your cell/ smartphone, internet including social media/websites, and gaming consoles. Use it only if related to school, work, or an emergency, not to rely on to make plans fir this day. Tell friends and family about your disconnection period. Once it's over, journal what the experience was like.

Renu K. Aldrich, M.A., LMFT, aka the Hindu Druid, has been a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 1997. She is a doctoral teaching intern at the Mercer University MFT Program. She specializes in working with developmental trauma survivors and studies how to incorporate Eastern healing techniques into Western psychotherapy. In addition to being a journalist, Renu has served as a communications executive in the publishing world, in academia, and on Wall Street. She launched Druid Magazine in 2015 in service to the spiritual community.

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Around the Americas: MAGUS Special Issue

Around the Americas

MAGUS: Druidry's Newest Camp Launches at Four Quarters

By Wendy Rose Scheers

From the moment we received the forwarded event from our local seed group in Canada for the Mid-Atlantic Gathering of the United States (MAGUS), we were drawn to it. On the 4th of May, my husband Chris and I crossed the U.S. border and drove many hours south into the Pennsylvanian woods to Four Quarters InterFaith Sanctuary in Artemas, Penn. for what would become the first MAGUS.

Although we have only been with the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) for six months, we had our own long history of Pagan belief that was based on respecting and connecting with the universal forces, the ancestors and the elements of nature, and the land. Our intention was to meet like-minded people, and we were not disappointed. Initially, we thought of ourselves as outsiders because we didn't know anyone, and we were not exactly sure what to expect. Lolly Nicol, who was in charge of registration, did a great job of making us feel welcome when we arrived that late Thursday afternoon.

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Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary, Artemas, PA

We bought four bottles of mead that Four Quarters makes and drove further up to the main grounds where we found Magus co-visionary David North guiding us on how to proceed with unpacking and parking the car. We nestled in our little room in the bunkhouse while others were setting up their tents by the river.

During the mandatory opening circle on Thursday, we learned more about the organizing team who had spent months preparing for this event. We heard the voices and saw the faces of the people we would spend the next three and a half days with. Everyone had

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an interesting story to tell of how they got to this particular time and place. We discovered we were not the only 'outsiders,' many attending had the same longing to connect and to learn. We were at ease; it was going to be fine. The voice of OBOD Druid Renu Aldrich, who was the special guest during this event and facilitated the opening icebreaker, was inviting and intriguing. It made us look forward to the rest of the weekend.

After our first shared dinner in the pavilion, OBOD Ovate Dean Easton presented the very first workshop. Nature was not easy on us; it had started to rain heavily. Somewhat cramped under a protective shelter, Dean inspired us with his strong, fiery voice about 'Kindling our Sacred Fire,' which was the theme for this gathering. It couldn't have been more appropriate and significant, and the tone was set for the weekend. Joined together under the tent, the initial distances between people who didn't know each other started to dissipate. After Dean's workshop, we moved back to the communal pavilion, where we shivered and laughed because of the rain and wind. The Opening Fire was obviously not able to go ahead as planned, instead a candle on the pavilion floor was the welcomed alternative.

The weather was playing tricks. That first evening and during the entire night, it poured rain with great force, and we were worried about the people in the tents who were camping by the river. But in the morning, people showed up at breakfast in good spirits. The organizers did a great job trying to make the planned events work. We had to bow to Nature's will, but creativity and adaptability are great human virtues.

Bardic and Ovate initiations were

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MAGUS
OBOD Mid-Atlantic Gathering, U.S.

scheduled throughout the weekend. For those who were not part of this, it was a time of wandering and exploring the Sanctuary. We filled these times connecting with the impressive standing Stone Circle and the labyrinth on top of the hill and walking along the fast-flowing Siding Hill Creek. We had interesting conversations while sipping warming coffees and enjoying the free-for-all divination sessions offered by those who generously shared their skills at the Coffee Dragon area of Four Quarters.

And last but not least, we enjoyed the crafts of the three vendors who became part of the new founded family of MAGUS. Due to the weather, artists Sophia Schulz (who is on the Four Quarters board of directors) Frank Stormcatcher, and Tempered Raven's Jake Armagost had moved from their initial locations in tents to the canopy of Coffee Dragon. Crafts, divination, and coffee or tea made a good combo for this Druid gathering!

On Friday morning, 12 Bards and three Ovates were initiated, while the others enjoyed free divination sessions. In the afternoon, everyone gathered for Renu's inspiring workshop: Kindling the Spiritual Warrior, in which she shared a personal account of her difficult life's journey and how to spark the protective and healing flame within. She spoke about how to guard and heal our boundaries and invited us to follow the path of the heartfelt Warrior by using creativity and the senses.

The weather finally started to clear

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up and OBOD Druid Dana O'Driscoll, overflowing with herbal wisdom, shared her workshop later that afternoon. 'Land Healing on the Inner and Outer Planes' was an uplifting call for healing. In addition to her knowledgeable information, we were gently prepared for a unique healing ceremony of the hemlock trees later that evening, the Ogham Tree Galdr. Dana offered each participant hemlock tea that she had prepared and a little stick she had carved with particular oghams. We each sat down organically in the Stone Circle, connecting with the land in our own unique way until we were called to move down to the river where the hemlocks were standing.

Two fires were lit by Brom Hanks, the dutiful fire master preparing the patch of land for the ritual. The four different groups, based on the ogham, received instructions on what the group had to sing and how they had to move. A mind-dazzling ceremony started. We were mesmerized by the sounds and movements we performed together. The separate groups became a spiraling unity of different sounds and movements, honoring and healing the hemlock trees. Dana's vision of a joined healing ceremony of the trees was for sure one of the highlights of the MAGUS gathering.

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That evening, the weather gods allowed Brom to finally bring the big fire to roaring life. We were called out to gather around the fire. Some people had been bringing drums and instruments, and a spontaneous drumming and dancing fest unfolded. The drummers evoked the dancers, the dancers enticed the drummers, moonlight shone unhindered, mead was shared and the fire burned hard and long.

For some, Saturday morning was a bit rough due to the previous night's festivities, but people had sweet memories to hold dear. After breakfast, Loam Ananda, the devoted horn blower, let us know that we had to gather at the pavilion for a workshop with Frank, who is a 'Guardian' in addition to an artist. His 'Spiritual Self Defense' workshop was based on his own experiences and knowledge of protective magic. We learned more about how to protect oneself against unpleasant or unwanted energies. He called himself a thug, but he was for sure a thug with a good sense of humor. His good advice and interesting stories made this a fascinating workshop that was adding to most people's knowledge about spirits and negative energies.

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We gathered again at the pavilion in the early afternoon for a workshop with OBOD Druid Wanda C. In her workshop: 'Awakening Your Beltane Sensuality,' she had us explore the boundaries and the sensations that are part of our human body. This sensorial workshop was followed by another pleasantry: 'The Fermented Beverage Competition.' Self-concocted mead and wine were put to the taste bud test. It was a jolly fine competition. We all had our own favorite, but the grand jury decided that Liam McGee's mead was the winner. We gladly emptied the competing bottles while chatting away under the canopy.

After dinner, many people were dressing up in robes for the big Beltane Ritual. It was going to be our last evening together and the most important shared ritual of MAGUS. In a long line, we moved into the Stone Circle and positioned ourselves in a big circle. David North and Nicole Sussurro were the Beltane celebrants who guided the ritual, supported by other organizers, facilitators, and participants, who each took on specific roles.

Many connections were made between people during these days, and it was heartwarming to share this Beltane ritual with everyone. We felt connected with each other and the land. Like the energy of Spring, rising and expanding, many felt that these days were helping to nurture new growth. Ideas and plans ascended from the fertile grounds of MAGUS.

The end of the Beltane Ritual was also the beginning of a farewell that was calling us from the near future. But we still had one big event to look forward to: Eisteddfod. Songs and stories were shared by whoever felt the Bardic inspiration stirring. Some surpassed their shyness and were applauded for their bravery. Laughter and cheers were filling the air while the bonfire was roaring. Brom had, once again, done a tremendous job of building a towering living monument of red, yellow, and orange flames. The fire was warming our bodies and spirits during this last cool night. It was a good night. It was a night of light. And once again, Liam found himself the winner, this time of Eisteddfod.

After the storytelling and song-singing ended, the drumming and dancing commenced. The sanctuary was filled for many more hours with laughter and the rhythmic sound of drums. Even in our bunkhouse bed we could hear the sounds of joy and good spirit of the last Beltane celebrations in the distance, while the waxing moon moved from east to west in the night sky, gradually making way for the sun of our last morning.

After breakfast on Sunday, everyone started to become practical again; it was time to pack up. But we still had one last sharing in the Stone Circle. We were invited to share our thoughts and feelings. Words from the heart were spoken by those who found them, and we all listened with gratitude. Brom touched

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our spirits without words by passing each of us and simply looking everyone in the eye. There were tears and smiles, heartfelt hugs, good intentions. and warm feelings. People were thanked, especially the organizing team who had put a huge effort in this first Mid-Atlantic Gathering. It was not a small feat, and with the unpredictable weather it was, at times, challenging. There had been some serious team work: The MAGUS staff; the Four Quarters Staff, who had done a great job with serving us nice, fresh food; the attendees who came from far and near; the energetic land, with its trees and river; the elemental forces of wind, rain, and fire; the sun, moon, and stars that filled us with their light; and the mead and the drums that made our hearts pump and blood run faster—they all conjoined to make this an unforgettable event.

We came from all directions, we centered in Four Quarters in Artemas, Pennsylvania, and we all left back to our homes—taking the MAGUS experience with us, in our hearts and minds. There was a lot to digest, a lot to think about, and a lot to feel. But one thing stood out above all: The path of the Druid, deeply connected to the land and the elements, was alive and well because of the hearts and minds of the people who were open to being vulnerable; who were sharing their wisdom; and who were, despite the challenges of the known and the unknown, willing to take the chance to make this work. It worked. It was good. We will be back next year!

Wendy Rose Scheers moved five years ago from Belgium and now lives with her husband Chris in Canada. She has been a meditation, relax yoga, and Tao teacher for the past 20 years. She is a hands-on bodyworker and published author. Her personal quest is the integration of Paganism, Taoist inner alchemy, and Druidry. She is a life-long student of the principles of heaven, earth and humanity, the heart.

BELTANE PETITION

BY AMBROSE

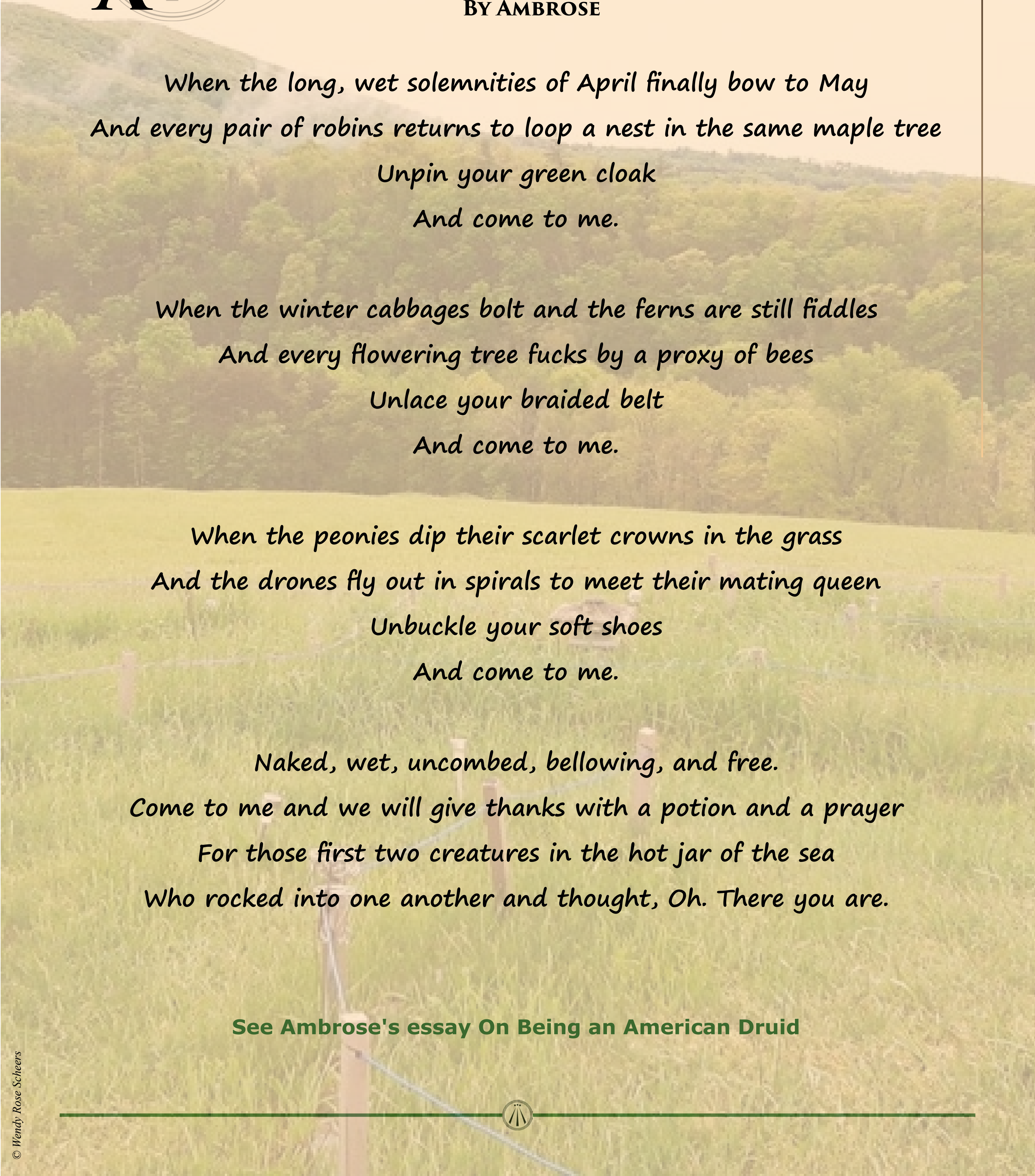
When the long, wet solemnities of April finally bow to May
And every pair of robins returns to loop a nest in the same maple tree
Unpin your green cloak
And come to me.

When the winter cabbages bolt and the ferns are still fiddles
And every flowering tree fucks by a proxy of bees
Unlace your braided belt
And come to me.

When the peonies dip their scarlet crowns in the grass
And the drones fly out in spirals to meet their mating queen
Unbuckle your soft shoes
And come to me.

Naked, wet, uncombed, bellowing, and free.
Come to me and we will give thanks with a potion and a prayer
For those first two creatures in the hot jar of the sea
Who rocked into one another and thought, Oh. There you are.

See Ambrose's essay On Being an American Druid



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KINDLING YOUR SPIRITUAL WARRIOR

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

In this time of political unrest and activism, spiritually minded Americans are seeking ways to give voice to their values. Protests, marches, and groups have formed to stand up for diversity and justice. However, many are uncertain how to personally contribute and feel hopeless it will actually make a difference. I have felt this bleakness in the face of others' pain countless times, including when I lived through 9-11. Once I found my path as a spiritual warrior, I was able to bring my values to my entire life. My healing journey from trauma led me to find ways of honoring the light in the darkness of violence, and I offer it here so that it may bring guidance to you for finding your own pathway.

I first heard the term *Spiritual Warrior* during a pilgrimage to India in 2008. It came in the form of a whisper of Awen directly to my heart from the Hindu God of transformation, Lord Siva. But I didn't know what it meant—the phrase confused me. After all, wasn't gentleness a cornerstone of spirituality in direct contrast to the violence inherent in the military? How was I, a follower of Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance principles, supposed to become a soldier? I meditated on this conundrum, and the truth eventually emerged—I had become a Spiritual Warrior just by looking for answers.

I discovered the term in the Tibetan

Buddhist tradition used as "A heroic being with a brave mind and ethical impulse. Different from other paths, which focus on individual salvation, the spiritual warrior's only complete and right practice is that which compassionately helps other beings with wisdom" ("Spiritual Warrior," 2017, para. 1). This is someone who combats the universal enemy: self-ignorance (*avidya*), which is the ultimate source of suffering. It resonated with me deeply as Lord Siva's teachings are aimed at destroying ego, illusion, and ignorance. One of my biggest illusions has been the idea of control, a common desire I share with many, to avoid more pain.

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But Revered Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön (2001) says, "A warrior accepts that we can never know what will happen to us next. We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty. This not-knowing is part of the adventure" (p. 4).

The real work of healing is to acknowledge the root cause of our pain so that we can not only find ways of soothing the wound, but also use it as the seed of our growth and spiritual transformation. We can then make room for self-love and fulfilling experiences, and perhaps greater understanding and compassion for what it means to be human. However we get here, those of us on this path share a common bond—a drive toward the truth about ourselves. In my self-work, I recognize that I am a lover of peace, but not a total pacifist, and neither was Gandhi. I spent many years as a Wiccan High Priestess working spells, understanding the highly complex and dangerous principle of using darkness in service of light.

Kindling the Internal Flame

The Random House dictionary gives

two meanings for the word warrior: "a person engaged or experienced in warfare; soldier" or "a person who shows or has shown great vigor, courage, or aggressiveness" (2017). What could be braver than revealing one's own soul? To peel back the layers to examine the shadow self, the dark corners we'd prefer to believe didn't exist? Søren Kierkegaard (2013), the 19th century psychologist and the Father of Existentialism, said we have a choice: "If I do not know who I am then I am living a lie, and living a lie, for most people is wrong" (p. 370).

A Spiritual Warrior, then, is someone who takes on the battle of walking through personal darkness to find the light of truth. We often have civil wars inside of ourselves as our complicated natures reveal contradictory feelings about the same thing. We cannot always understand why we feel multiple ways about someone or something; we are complex beings and our relationships are ever-evolving. Underlying our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are schemas that contain the messages and inputs from all of our experiences and socialization.

In marital and family therapy, most of the arguments between family members are unresolvable because it's not always about right or wrong, rather different perspectives and needs that clash. What heals rifts between people are attempts to understand and repair offenses, peaceful and empathic discourse, and acceptance that the disagreement does not mean disapproval or lack of love. Accepting how we feel within our own minds can follow this pattern, too, especially when there is emotional duality. It can help us find peace and understand with greater clarity about our mission in life, our spiritual warriorhood. Within the conflict lies your pathway to peace.

Western psychology calls the process of finding our true selves "individuation," when our innate personality, life experiences, and psyche integrate into a stable, healing force. Understanding the personal unconscious mind and the collective unconscious of society was a bedrock concept of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who believed that experiences were an expression of a deeper meaning that could lead to spiritual awakening. In Hinduism, the Kundalini is the serpent of power coiled at the base of our spine that, when awakened and unfurled through the chakras, gives rise to self-realization and enlightenment. It is a spiritual peak experience also manifested in physical form—much as our ideas give rise to action.

Human Motivation

My spiritual warriorhood initiated from a spiritual peak experience that led me to consider my overall beliefs about the reason for existence. This subject has probably always been an intense topic of debate, and several theorists give us great thoughts to chew on.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1973), an early 19th century German philosopher, believed that the Universe and all of its

creatures are motivated solely by the *will to live* and that this results in a mindless drive to procreate and to fruitlessly avoid death. A generation later, Friedrich Nietzsche (1966) explained human behavior by theorizing that the *will to power* was stronger than Schopenhauer's premise because people actually risk their lives for achievement and ambition. He believed that life was worth living only if you had goals inspiring you. This would eventually influence Alfred Adler (Dushman & Sutherland, 1997) into creating the concept of individual psychology in direct odds with his former mentor, Sigmund Freud.

Freud (1961/1930), the esteemed yet much maligned founder of psychoanalysis, conjectured in the 20th century that we operate out of a *will to pleasure*, seeking to satisfy our biological and psychological needs until we mature and learn to tolerate pain as well as to defer gratification in the face of reality. This is still expressed today in the ethical theory of hedonism (Hedonism, 2017), which gives credence to ethical arguments that the right thing to do will augment pleasure and reduce pain.

Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl (2006), after his experiences in German concentration camps during World War II, said we are driven by the *will to meaning*. He states that our primary motivation is to find a reason for our lives. We can discover meaning by our deeds; through connection to another person, nature, or art; or by unavoidable suffering. This theory most closely resonates with my beliefs from both Druidry and Hinduism.

In the Hindu scriptures *The Upanishads*, it states that life has been created because it's in the Supreme Deity's nature to do so. The never-ending cycle of life, death, and rebirth is the Universe's natural state. For Hindus, there is meaning in everything because rather than the material world, life is rooted in our collective consciousness. God exists as a duality—both within us and as an external entity. Our purpose through the cycle of births and everyday challenges is to connect our internal life force back to the divine source. *Moksha*, spiritual liberation, is achieved by overcoming ignorance, but there are as many roads to this as there are human beings. We each experience our connection with the Universe and each other in our own unique ways with *karmic* lessons unfolding like lanterns on a dimly lit road. *Dharma* is the path of morality we develop and live by in order to reach *moksha*.

Gandhi's nonviolent methods were influenced by the Jain religion, which was created in India around 500 BC as a way to break the cycle of reincarnation and achieve peace. Under this belief system, there is no God, rather teachers who have reached enlightenment and have disentangled themselves from the material nature of the universe. Ascetic Jains believe we can reach spiritual freedom by: not harming any living thing for any reason, speaking the truth, not stealing, abstaining from sex, and not becoming attached to people, places, or things. Lay Jains use a less strict set of rules to advance along this pathway during their lifetime.

Siddhartha Gautama's search for the meaning of life led to the development of Buddhism. This religion has Four Noble Truths: suffering is inherent in existence; the search for permanence leads to suffering; suffering can cease; the way to end suffering is by following an Eightfold Path of right living. In Buddhism, the goal of life isn't union with God, but the termination of longing and attachment.

Consider which of these theories may resonate with your own worldview and concept of existence. Whatever our motivating force may be, a Spiritual Warrior's goal is to pierce through the illusions of life and to gain distance from limited perspectives. Arming yourself with knowledge is the key to beginning the seeker's quest. There are a few ways to develop the insight and clarity we need to form our unique pathway.

Quickening the Flame

My spiritual warriorhood led me to delve into my pain not only to heal myself from the past, but to help others. It didn't just give me a reason to survive and to seek a better life, it became part of the inextinguishable fire inside my core. I cannot regret my past experiences because they now enable me to benefit others as a licensed marriage and family therapist (MFT) with a specialization in developmental trauma as well as a teacher, clinical supervisor, researcher, and writer. These are the avenues that help me form bridges and to decrease the division between groups.

For instance, I teach classes on social justice and ethics to a new generation of MFTs and also facilitate a panel discussion on inclusion and diversity at our major national conference each year. You may not see me marching every week on Times Square, but I find my power—my voice—through the activities that enrich me and make a difference to the world, even if one person at a time.

Among these activities, I was the special guest at the Mid-Atlantic Gathering in the United States (MAGUS), an OBOD camp set in the beautiful Four Quarters InterFaith Sanctuary in Artemas, Penn. I gave a workshop on kindling the Spiritual Warrior within, intended to help participants delve deeper into their inner fire. Fire can burn through things that do not serve you on your path whether you are ready for that or not! Connecting with it means swimming in the primordial energy that is you.

We are all different people, and how we connect is different. Many visualize while others gain insight when writing and some need to draw it out. One thing most of us benefit from is being more comfortable in our bodies and giving our monkey minds something to feast upon. So the following experiential activities are designed to tap into your creative selves, and you may find some resonate with you more than others. This is part of the experience. Even if you have done these types of things before, I want to invite you to experience it with an air of not knowing. Imagine you don't know what will happen, and be open to letting the experience unfold for you. The energy of your environment can either harm or fuel this journey for you, so prepare for it to take you places you need to go or show you pathways of exploration.

Take care of yourself. If it's too intense, take a breather, focus on your needs in the moment.

Centering

- Take three breaths, inhaling in through the nose, holding for a count of three, then exhaling from the mouth loudly
- Light body exercise: Feel the light emanating from the ground and spiraling through your feet. Feel the tingling sensation as it travels up your legs to your tummy, chest, arms, neck. Your third eye could be winking now. Feel the light shine from the crown of your head and outward, energy from the light body flowing through you. Slowly breathe in and exhale out.

First Directive: Writing & poetry

- In a relaxed state, read the following poem and consider the words:

A wall strong in numbers
Burns the midnight candle
The brave arm in arm
Stands before them now
Up against the wind
Old ways up against the wind

The game is in their hands
Calling out the color
Togetherness, their courage
Recognize the power
Make a stand before them
Old ways follows the beaten track
Against the wind
Against the wind

Artist Maire Brennan

Defying their leaders
Holding out for free will
The strong dare to echo
Nothing can stop
Nothing can stop us now
Up against the wind
Old ways up against the wind

The game is in your hands
Reach for every moment
In rising generations
Capturing the change
Make a stand before them
Old ways follows the beaten track
Against the wind...(Brennan, 1992)

- Read the poem a second time, now inhaling the words and feeling them inside your light body. Consider what you are feeling.
- Write for five minutes without thinking about what you want to say. Just start writing anything in stream-of-consciousness. Free associate, say you don’t know what to write, anything at all, but don’t stop until the five minutes are over.
- Read what you have written and become aware of how it makes you feel and what associations you make.

Second Directive: Kinesthetics & Music

- Listen to the song *Against the Wind* (Brennan, 1992)
- Swaying or dance to the music. Let yourself go in the moment and feel

your body as it moves.

- Sit and focus on your breath. What is your heart telling you to do? To say? Where do your passions lie?
- When you feel ready, open your eyes and draw how you feel
- Now write a few sentences to go along with it. What would the title be?
- Share with others, including us at Druid Magazine!

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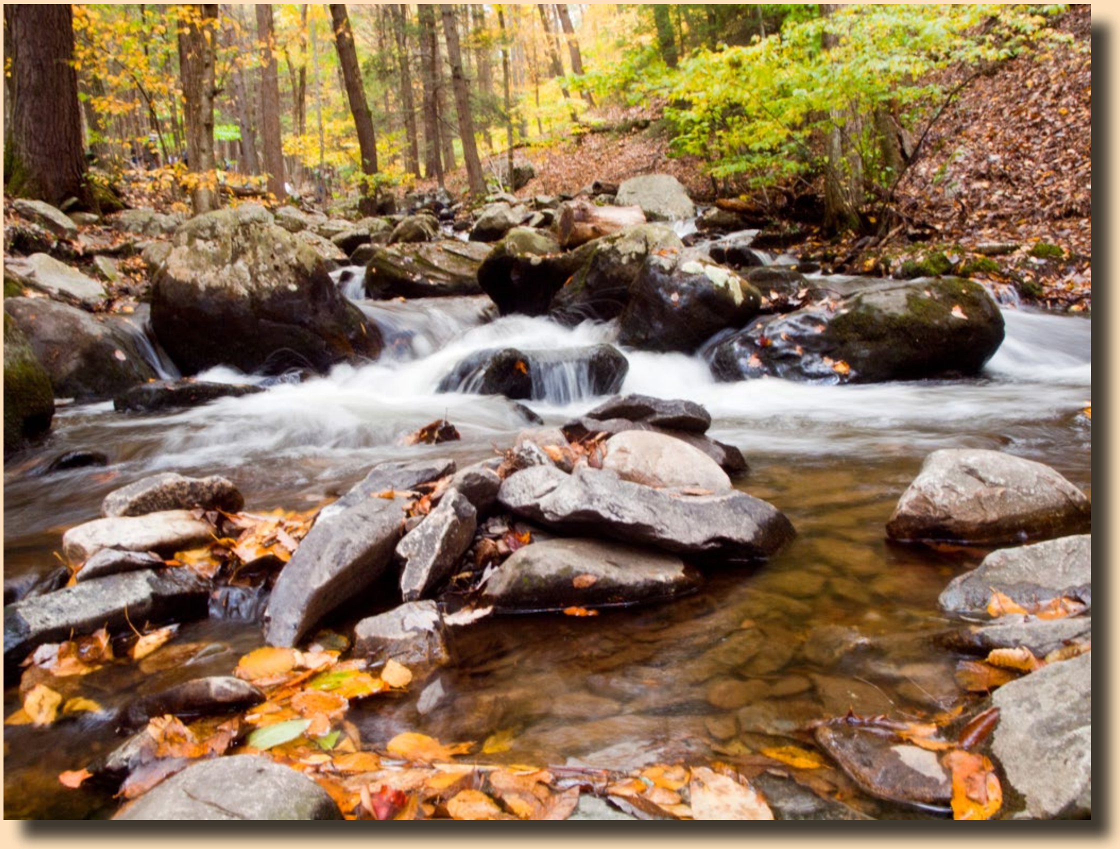

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A DRUID'S GUIDE TO LAND HEALING WITHIN AND WITHOUT

BY DANA O'DRISCOLL

Many Druids see themselves as "edgewalkers." That is, we find ourselves walking the path between the mundane and the sacred. We find ourselves honoring the land while bearing witness to damage and destruction of nature that is out of our control. As the Druid tradition is, first and foremost, a tradition of nature spirituality, it is necessary for Druids to develop tools to respond to and work with nature in various ways and contexts.

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One of the roles that many of us find ourselves taking up is the path of healing the land, of regenerating damaged ecosystems both physically and energetically. I have been doing this land healing in various ways for most of my life—as a Druid, as a certified permaculture designer, and as a wild tender and traditional western herbalist. This article offers a brief introduction to this topic and is drawn from a larger series of posts on The Druid's Garden blog and from my 2017 MAGUS workshop on land healing.

What is healing?

To begin to talk about healing work, it is useful to start with some definitions. *Merriam-Webster* offers several definitions for the word "heal:"

1. to make sound or whole <*heal* a wound>; to restore to health; to cause (an undesirable condition) to be overcome
2. to patch up (a breach or division) <*heal a breach between friends*>
3. to restore to original purity or integrity <*healed of sin*>

All of these definitions are directly applicable to physical and energetic land healing work we can do as Druids. In definition one, we can recognize that a good deal of our land is in a damaged state, and we can talk about how to heal that damage in various physical ways—to restore ecosystems and waterways to health and abundance. Lawns, farms, traditional landscapes, strip mines, logged areas—many of these spaces are damaged ecosystems in need of healing. Many forests are still in a recovery phase after logging. Here in Pennsylvania, for example, 98% of our original forest cover was logged less than a century ago (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1898).

In our second definition, we recognize that part of land healing is regenerating the connections between humans and nature (both ourselves, but also our broader community and larger culture). Healing, in part, is about reconnecting. Our third definition recognizes that healing is also about restoring something to its original wholeness and completeness. This is the ultimate goal of land healing on a physical level, but it's not necessarily something that we can do in every place given some of the challenges we face.

As Above, So Below: A Consideration of Planes and Energy

To understand fully how we might heal the land, and the options for doing so, we need to have a framework that accounts for the different levels of reality. These levels are commonly referred to in the western magical traditions as "the planes" as well as the energy that flows and that we can draw upon.

Nearly all spiritual practice and magical practice is based on the understanding (explicit or implicit) of the fact that realities and energies exist outside of what we can perceive with our five senses. Within the Western esoteric traditions, with influence from Eastern traditions, the idea of "the planes" is complex, with a number of different models describing different kinds of planes. Each model we have for these different realms of perception and experience is an attempt to simplify and explain more complex phenomena—and so each model is with its limitations, but all are still useful as illustrative tools. I'm going to use a fairly standard model found in magical practice (adapted from John Michael Greer's *Circles of Power, 1997*):

- **The Physical Plane (outer):** What we can experience through our five physical senses is in the outer plane. This is the physical reality of our existence. When we think about land healing, this is the physical nature of reality that we can see: cut trees, poisoned rivers, dead bees, starving polar bears, toxic waste, and so on.
- **The Etheric Plane:** Often, when people talk about "energy" in a room or space, they are sensing the etheric plane. The etheric is also experienced through our senses, but not the same senses that experience the physical plane. The etheric is very closely connected to life on earth; in the Druid tradition, the energy of this plane is nwyfre. From a land healing

standpoint, our senses of the etheric helps us say, "wow, there is a bad feeling here" or a "heaviness" or "stagnation." It's on the etheric that a lot of the "energetic" work can be done.

- **The Astral Plane:** The astral is the level of our consciousness that transcends matter and manifests as imagination, emotion, memory, will, or intellectual facilities. This level, of course, also transcends what is inside of our heads. Much journeying work (whether it's called astral projection, shamanic journeying, or pathworking) happens on this plane.

Both the etheric and the astral are considered "inner" planes. The reason I present the planes here is that they are critical to framing any kind of land healing work. Part of this is because healing works along the lines of the hermetic adage, "As above, so below. As within, so without." That is, what occurs on the physical plane reflects inward to the other planes, and likewise, what happens on the inner planes reflects outward into manifestation.

This means, of course, if you are to do physical healing on the land, the energy can weave its way within and have a healing effect as well (even if all you are doing is physical work). But even if you aren't able to do physical healing, you can do other kinds of energetic healing through ritual, energy work, setting standing stones, and the like. You can have this more positive energy trickle outward, manifesting on the material plane and providing one of the necessary tools for nature to heal herself.

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Dana O'Driscoll giving a reading at MAGUS for Dean Easton with Loam Ananda watching.

Understanding this principle is the key to understanding the entire framework of land healing that I am presenting.

The Ways of Land Healing

Examining the above definitions and levels of existence has given us a roadmap of the kinds of healing that can be done on different levels using the tools that are available to us in the Druid tradition. To frame this in a different way, I'd like to use the metaphor of a human illness because the parallels are striking. And so, I see at least four kinds of land healing that we can do:

1. Active Healing Work

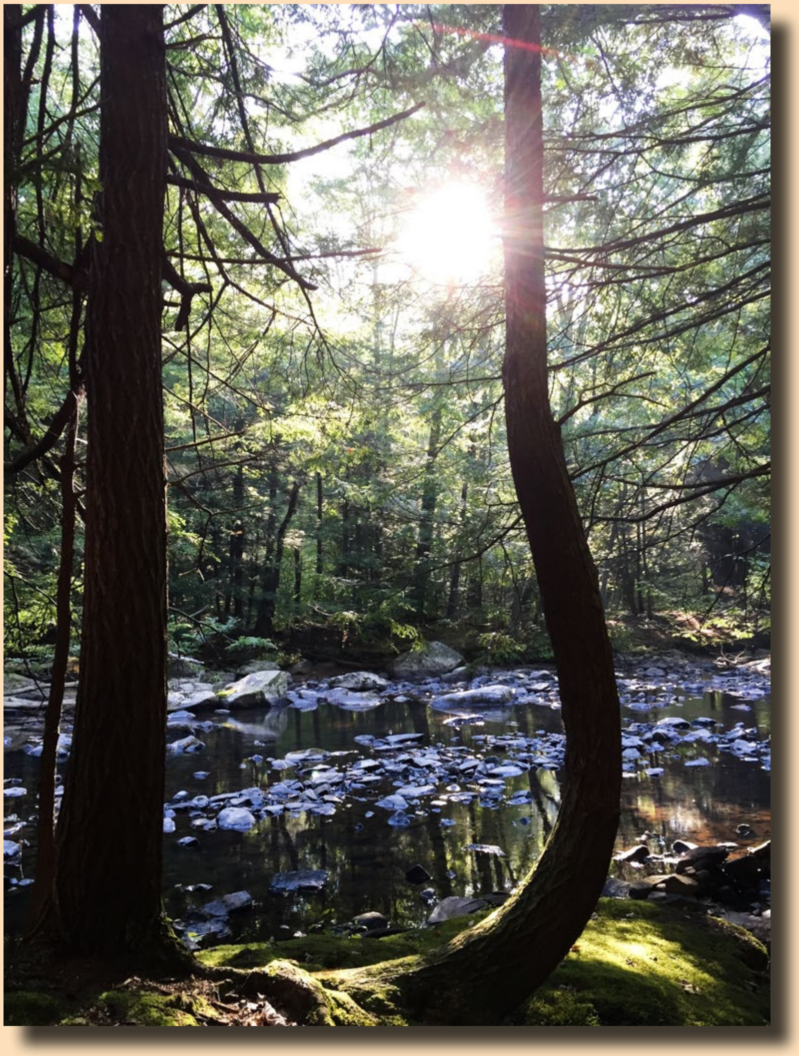
Active healing work is just that—you are physically, energetically, or using a combination of approaches to help restore nature to a more healthy state. Using our sick person metaphor, this would be the long recovery period after a major illness—the person is on the mend, but they need a lot of help to be fully recovered (physical therapy, friendship, good food support, companionship, and so on). The land is no different—we can offer much opportunity for nature to heal through physical or energetic means.

Direct Physical Healing and Land Regeneration*.* This is when we are engaged in healing of the physical landscape on the material plane. In this work, the land is obviously in a damaged state of some kind (e.g., a front lawn devoid of biodiversity, a strip mine, a logged forest, an abandoned farm field), and you have to be in a position to do the land healing (direct access to the land, land ownership, permission, or a place nobody cares about, etc.). Physical healing practices are wide ranging: planting trees, regenerating an ecosystem, tending the wilds, scattering native seeds, cleaning up toxins, river cleanup, converting lawns to gardens, and cultivating ecosystems. Some of the tools for this include permaculture design, agroforestry, riparian zone repair, and conservation efforts. One of the keys to this work is cultivating *ecosystems* and *soil diversity* rather than thinking on an individual planting level. I think that this kind of healing, combined with energetic healing, is one of the best things you can do to heal our lands—if you are able and if the situation warrants it.

A few specific techniques Druids might use include:

- Converting part of a lawn to a bee or butterfly habitat
- Creating seed balls (using 2/3 clay and 1/3 compost and native seeds) and scattering them
- Planting trees (in my area, hardwood nut trees take longer to regrow, so I specifically focus on these)
- Planting and tending plants on the United Plant Savers At Risk or Endangered list (American Ginseng, Goldenseal, Ramps, and so on) (United Plant Savers, n.d.).

Energetic healing work*.* Now we move into direct healing that can be done on the non-physical planes. Energetic healing is a wonderful compliment to the direct land healing work above (and, ideally, healing of the land should include both) but can also be done independently of direct physical healing work. You might think about energetic healing with your sick friend as the non-physical and necessary supports: your companionship, your stories, your songs, reiki healing, drumming and music, and any other energetic support you can provide. The land is no different; here, you are raising energy through ritual and ceremony to help the land recover.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Energetic healing rituals and activities are quite wide ranging. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Setting a standing stone and channeling the light of the heavens into the earth
- Doing a ritual or series of rituals across the full cycle of the seasons using various "energy raising" techniques (chanting Awens, dancing, drumming, calling the elements, fire magic, etc.)
- A Celtic Galdr Ritual (like the one we did at the MAGUS Gathering) where we chanted ogham and circled an Eastern Hemlock tree to help them fight the hemlock wooly adelgid. This included each participant drawing an ogham stave and being organized into four groups invoking Apple, Blackthorn (Blackberry in our ecosystem), Birch, and Oak (O'Driscoll, 2017).
- Blessing water and infusing it with positive energy (at the Summer Solstice) and then offering small bits of it to the land.
- Establishing and tending a land healing shrine near the site of healing (or somehow linked to that site, for example, taking a stone from the site and focusing direct healing energy into the stone at a distance).

2. Palliative Care

As a land healer, it's critical to understand the difference between *healing* and *palliative care*. Palliative care is what we do to help soothe active suffering, to help the land sleep or be energetically distanced from what is physically occurring. You might think about someone who is really sick and who is in for a long illness or long battle with a disease that is ongoing. You see them suffering, and the best you can do is try to soothe their wounds, comfort their tired spirit, and let them rest until the worst is over. If you try to raise a bunch of positive energy on lands actively being damaged for the distinct purpose of healing, it can be like waking up that sick person and trying to get them walking around (which only harms them further). Using your five senses and your inner senses to actively observe and listen can help you ascertain what kind of work (palliative care or healing) you want and might need to do.

This kind of work is appropriate for polluted waterways, active strip mines, actively logged forests, manicured lawns, and other places where damage is continual and often severe. In my experience in working on a variety of distressed landscapes, I know that **healing** can only take place where there is *opportunity for physical regeneration*. The whole idea of healing is to restore and regenerate; you can't do that if there is active destruction taking place. You still can do energetic work, but you do not want it to be directed towards the purposes of regeneration or recover, but rather soothing the worst of the suffering.

Energetic Palliative Care*.* Most palliative care is energetic, and learning how to do palliative care is a critical part of land healing.

- The magic of acknowledgement, witnessing, and holding space (which sound exactly as they are—offering your support, acknowledging, being willing to see)
- The magic of apology (apologizing to the land spirits on behalf of humans)
- The magic of remembrance (dedicating a regular day or place to honor them and remember those who were lost)
- Solar blessings to get rid of the worst of the darkness; channeling down the energy of the sun for palliative care purposes
- Offering music and song to damaged landscapes
- Putting the land in "energetic hibernation." I do this by sending the energetic patterns of the land deep into the stones/bedrock, except for in fracking situations
- Working with distancing the pain. I invoke a plant spirit called "Ghost Pipe" (monotropa uniflora),

> but other plants (like hawthorn, crataegus spp. or apple, malus pumila) or a deity focused on that work would equally be effective.

Physical Palliative Care. There is also the possibility of physical palliative care. I sometimes go to sites that will be destroyed (like when an oil pipeline comes through) and save seeds from the plants there, or even dig up rare native plants, and transplant them. This kind of work is less frequent, but it is extremely meaningful.

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3. Preventative Care

Preventative care is what we do to prevent the need for land healing, much like we humans go to doctors for regular preventative care. The more that we can preserve and protect existing ecosystems, the less work we need to do to heal our lands. Here are two methods of preventative care that we can do as part of our path of land healing:

Healing human-land connections. Healing human-land connections means working to build your own relationship with the land and helping others do the same. You might think about it in terms of our sick person metaphor, like preventative care; our goal here is to avoid any illness in general. People protect what they cherish, and building more firm connections between humans and nature allows us to help prevent damage to our lands. This work could include leading plant walks, teaching locally-based herbalism, teaching nature awareness, doing community activism, and forming community groups. Additionally, helping people understand the interconnectedness of their health with the health of the land helps do this work.

Shifting Actions. Shifting your actions to consume less and create less of a burden on the land is not a method of land healing, but it is a method of mitigation and prevention. This shift is the kind of behaviors and actions that we do in order to mitigate further damage, to reduce our impact on the land, and so on. This typically happens through various kinds of "sustainable" practices and earth-centered living; a lot of options presented to us by mainstream society fall in here (and many of the not-so-mainstream): shifting to local diets, ethical sourcing of goods, growing some of your own food, reducing or eliminating fossil fuel use, and so on.

4. Self-Care and Land Healing

I want to conclude by stressing the importance of self-care as part of this process. Land healing is often difficult work, from physical regeneration (where we might be starting from dead soil and dead ecosystems) to raising healing energy. And the most challenging is, of course, palliative care. Just like in any of the helping professions, land healing work requires us to actively tend to our own needs. Here are a few ways you might do so:

- Time spent in healthy and healing ecosystems
- Supporting our physical bodies through good food, exercise, good sleep, and rest
- Supporting our adrenals through herbs like wild oats, lemon balm, and stinging nettle
- Daily protective or energetic work
- Working with the energies, deities, and powers of light and life
- Embracing the power of hope
- Spending healing time with other like-minded people for support

I hope that this article has offered you resources to continue or begin your own land healing journey! Feel free to contact me for conversation and questions.

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A Triad for Rekindling Sacred Fire

By Dean Easton

Speaking of Fire

Every Druid tradition I know of honors fire in some way. "It is the hour of recall," go the closing lines of OBOD ritual. "As the fire dies down, let it be relit in our hearts."

Here is the promise of elemental fire, never quenched, always ready to rekindle. But so often I find myself dry, cool, grounded, earthed—all excellent things after ritual, ideal for smooth re-entry into our lives, but hard to live from when we crave and need the flame again.

I've detected more than a fair portion of Earth in my makeup: a little reserved, suspicious of quick flares, with a tendency to solidity, inertia even. Does a spark still smolder in the heart of a person like that, waiting to be relit? Can I coax it to flame again? I hold the answers like twin children, one in each arm: *of course*, and *not today*. As I write this, I look out the window at fog and wet pavement. Where do I look for

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flame? In moments like these, it seems a more than reasonable question.

Yes, in the electrified West, we turn a key to start the car, we flip any number of switches all day along, expecting and usually seeing instantaneous lights, readouts, computers booting, phone screens lighting, and hums and rumbles of devices jumping into action. If, like me, you happen to heat with wood, you lay paper and kindling, strike a match, and flame obliges. Praise be to Brighid!

But for all that, I keep reminding myself, we do not command fire. In her *The Way of Four Spellbook* (2006), Deborah Lipp notes:

> Fire has always been set apart from the other elements, because Fire alone has no natural home on the earth; Air has the sky, Water the sea, and Earth the land, but only Fire stands apart from geography. In nature, Fire is the outsider; it is out of control, and it conforms to no known rules. (p. 10)

This is lovely and poetic, evocative and wise, and, as a friend remarked when I quoted it to him, it's also bullshit. The only place fire happens *is* geography, just like with every other element. Heart, fire pit, computer screen, creativity—we light and relight them constantly. It's our extensive craft with the fire principle that's made much of civilization possible. But mastery in the end means service, and our wizardry rings hollow whenever we forget this.

Serving Fire

"I am a servant of the Secret Fire," declares Gandalf in The Fellowship of the Ring (Tolkien, 2004, p. 330). Not a bad magical declaration. So I turn to the Indo-European past and summon reconstructed (*see* note) ancient words to say something like it: *Ambikwolos esmi yagnos ogneyes [Ahm-BEE-kwoh-lohs EHS-mee YAHG-nohs OHG-neh-yes], which translates to "I am a servant of the sacred fire."

So I ask how I already serve fire, because contrary to an adolescent tendency in us to see our lives as all-or-nothing, we have a starting place within us for anything that can manifest—or so some Wise Ones have told me. How else can we recognize a lack or hole or void except by feeling the outline of what's missing, of what's supposed to be there?

Now, when I need to reignite the fire of the sacred, and that includes writing about it, my daily practice, my own "hour of recall," hopefully guides me to embers that still throw off heat. (If it doesn't, I know I need to fine-tune what I do each day.) I keep re-learning that we never really extinguish sacred fire. We merely *smoor* it—that lovely old Scottish word—not "smother" or "suffocate" as some dictionary entries render it, but bank it, setting it to smolder till morning, when it can be breathed and fed to flame again. Peat excels at smoldering but so do woods like hickory, and so do our human spirits.

While preparing a fire workshop for the Magus Beltane camp, out of ruminations like these, I made a list of questions I found I kept asking myself, so I shared them with attendees. Here are seven from that list you might use in your journal, or for a series of meditations. And if one or two of them call you away from reading this, go with them for a while along your own green and shining path. Your responses are more valuable, after all, than "finishing the article."

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1) What does it take—literally and intentionally—in order to kindle you, and in order for you to kindle other things in your life?

2) What offering, if any, do you make to help you kindle? What else could you bring into your practice? What could you discard?

3) What is sacred to you? How do you find, invite, welcome, increase the sacred? What sacred ways are a part of your life right now that can help you kindle?

4) What ways, if any, do you tend to discount, push away, ignore, or feel "aren't my way of connecting with the sacred"? What can you learn from your attitude towards them?

5) Where are you already kindled? What is burning, warm, or fiery in your life right now?

6) Where do you desire kindling? (Where do you need to bank a fire and cool off?!)What needs to catch fire in your life?

7) How has sacred fire already honored your practice and flames inwardly for you?

Building a Ritual Fire

In reconstructed Indo-European, one of the words for "altar" is **asa*. If you want to expand your ritual declarations and charm-making, you can say **asam kwero* [AH-sahm KWEH-roh] "I build an altar." And if you're consecrating a talisman or another person, you might add **Yagnobi ognibi* *tum wikyo!* [YAHG-noh-bee OHG-nee-bee toom wee-KYOH!] "I hallow you with sacred fire!"

What to burn on that altar? Here your judgment, tempered and instructed by divination, practice, dream, and study, matters more than anything I might suggest. But if you're seeking such a suggestion, here is one: Druid and Pagan traditions speak of Nine Sacred Trees suitable for kindling sacred fires (Steward of the Woods, 2015).

What about an altar? You may well have one already, whether backyard fire pit or space cleared on a bookshelf for images, a piece of quartz found on a walk, Tarot card for the day, incense of the season, and so on.

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Evidence from several different traditions tells us that squares of sod or turf were a common form that a ritual altar could take. The *Aeneid* (Mandelbaum, 1961, p. 117) mentions a sod altar. Records from the Scots in the 1700s (Frazer, 1929) talk of building May Day fires on an altar of sod. And the Æcerbōt, the Anglo-Saxon "Land Remedy Spell," amounts to a ritual for creating sacred space and restoring the land's fertility (Jolly, 1996). To do so, it instructs the ritual performer to take one sod from each of the four directions of the land to build the ritual altar. Ceisiwr Serith (2015), an experienced ADF ritualist, author, and Indo-Europeanist, gives more supporting info in an article on his website, "Proto-Indo-European Religion."

In closing, I turn for words to the Rig-Veda 1.26.8: "For when the gods have a good fire, they bring us what we wish for. Let us pray with a good fire" (Three Cranes Grove, 2007).

Note on reconstructed Proto-Indo-European:

The * asterisk is a conventional notation for indicating a reconstructed form. You can never know enough about linguistic prehistory to do more than mangle reconstructed languages. Even graduate study like mine in historical linguistics inoculates precisely nobody from errors. So, in releasing perfectionist worries over Indo-European reconstructions and pronunciations, I cherish the advice of the great medievalist scholar, teacher, and author John Gardner. In advising readers when trying to speak Middle English aloud, he remarks, "Read aloud or recite with authority, exactly as when speaking Hungarian—if you know no Hungarian – you speak with conviction and easy familiarity. (This, I'm told by Hungarians, is what Hungarians themselves do.) This easy authority, however fake, gets the tone of the language ..." (1978, p. 315). Tone, we might say, covers a multitude of sins.

If you'd like to learn more, two readable, popular, and authoritative books are by West and Mallory, included in references. Work through them and you won't need me or anyone else. You'll be writing your own reconstructed Indo-European phrases and rituals with "conviction and easy authority."

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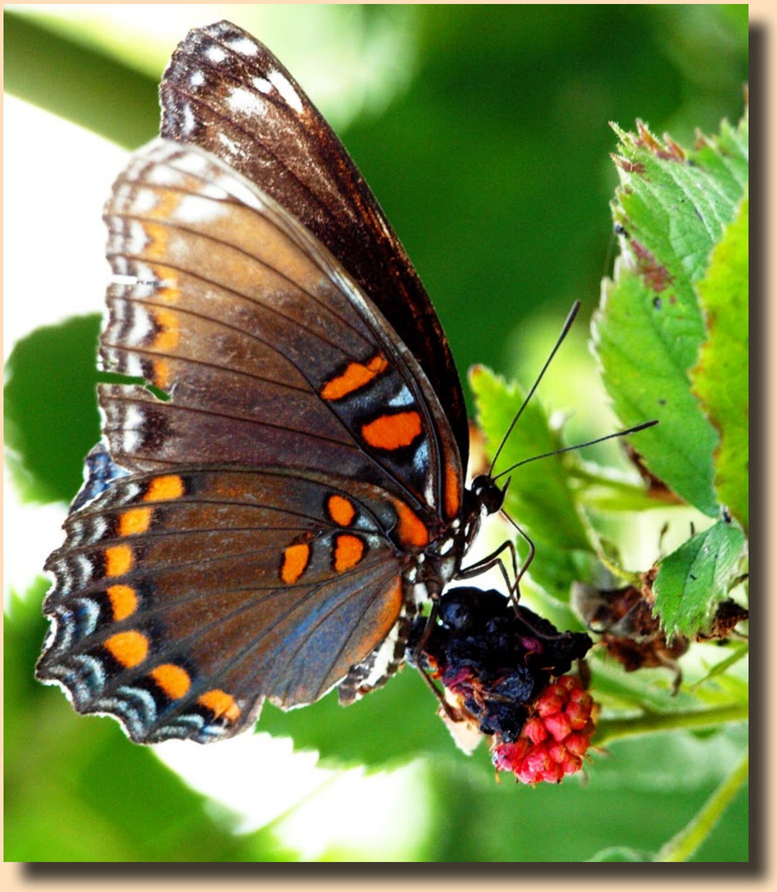
AWAKENING YOUR BELTANE SENSUALITY

BY WANDA C

"Awaken from your sleep and let each of your senses ignite the sensuality within you…"

Those who attended MAGUS were invited to this hands-on, interactive session, opening the window of their sensuality for Beltane. Almost 40 Druids chose to embark upon a sensual journey as the earth awoke to embrace the fertile fields and budding leaves. They were there to open their minds, rejuvenate their bodies, and enliven their spirits, and experience the world anew once again upon the blessed magical time of Beltane.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Senses were caressed and touched through sensory deprivation to awaken the body from its typical comfort zone and let go of the mind-centered experience. It allowed each participant to center and balance as they became aware of the essence of Beltane that was all around us. Gathered around a center table in the dining pavilion at Four Quarters were the many, hungry to ignite their sensuality for Beltane. What better place to feed those flames when surrounded by fertile forests, budding leaves, and caressing winds, whispering of Beltane magic in the air?

The participants were taken on a journey of sight, sound, and taste as they delved into the many pleasures of the senses. First, however, a disclaimer needed to be issued to help protect those who may get triggered by previous traumatic or abusive experiences. The attendees were instructed not to do anything they were not comfortable doing since this was meant to be a fun and sensual journey, a pleasurable and positive experience.

I introduced myself and had each participant share something about themselves so that we would all know where each other is coming from—the situations and everyday life that is our own. I shared that my previous job was very boring, monotonous, tedious, and just mind numbing. Indoors, it lacked the wondrous joy of life that is in nature all around us. I also asked each person to describe what sort of clothes, if any, that they were wearing or wore at work? They were asked, "Can you remember the feel of it?" Rough, soft, heavy or light? Finally, we discussed allergies or aversions to food to finish the introduction.

Once acquainted, we continued the journey by grounding. It is very relaxing and one of the most powerful things you can do, a gift to yourself. It costs nothing and, yet, is so often overlooked.

To explore sensuality and awaken it, we discussed definitions of sensuality. Indulgence of the senses was the key as the list of synonyms were spoken, and we realized that the main components of sensuality are the senses: taste, sight, touch, smell, and hearing. Our senses allow us to learn, to protect ourselves, and to enjoy our world. Can you imagine what it might be like to live your life without any of your senses? Our senses work together to give us a clear picture of the things all around us and what we encounter in our world. If one sense is impaired in some way, the other senses will take over or become stronger to help compensate and make up for the missing one.

In our jobs, we tend to use our eyes the most, we rely on them. Hearing plays a huge part as does touch, not the touch of exploration but of physical use. When we are speaking, our ears are engaged but it can be not really listening, or it is more selective and we drown out the little sounds.

One way to journey into the senses is to take one of them away. Sensory deprivation blocks the sense's stimuli and, thereby, will heighten the others. By doing this, you can really attune yourself to learning more about the world around you and perhaps see and experience things as if for the very first time, awakening one or more of the senses left still open to stimuli.

How often have you really thought about the rough exterior of a luscious strawberry? The creamy smoothness of a cashew or a good piece of dark, rich chocolate? To truly feel them upon your tongue and take the time to allow your taste buds to come alive, you first need to block one of your senses.

At this class of Awakening Your Beltane Sensuality, each person was handed a set of earplugs and a blindfold. We began by listening to many loud, intrusive, rude, and some every day sounds that were played, one right after another, to duplicate some of the many sounds we hear at work or in our cars in the middle of traffic. The sounds of the city and people and then animals were played, all coming together as one in a huge cacophony of an assault upon our sense of hearing.

Each person was instructed to don their blindfolds and then it was their choice if they were able to use the earplugs as well to remove the stimuli to their sense of sight and hearing. So, after all that noise, noise, noise, there was silence. Earplugs, fingers, hands, or just listening to the quieter sounds of the surrounding forest, took our hearts from pounding and startling our bodies to a calm and quiet place.

By removing the sense of sight by utilizing the black blindfolds given out, gone was the bright sunlight. Gone from our sight was the image of our friends and the beauty of the land all around us: birds, leaves, trees, dirt, the pavilion, the table, the presenter; only darkness and blackness descended upon our worlds. No color, no light. Sitting in chairs, we did not worry about falling, only sitting on benches amongst friends in the dark at midday. Long deep breaths taken in the silent darkness as several minutes went by as each was given time in their own dark, quiet time.

After a few minutes, with a gentle touch upon their shoulder, each person could remove their earplugs or hands so that their sense of hearing was given back to them. New were the sounds then to first strike the ear drums. Gentle and quiet were the birds and the wind in the trees. The sound of the footsteps of the presenter or quiet nervous laughter of a friend. Keeping eyes closed or blindfolds on, each person listened. They heard more of nature's natural songs than before. As each one of us took deep, long breaths, we listened to rustling of leaves and the rippling stream, and our own breathing.

There are many ways to awaken the senses, not only natural sounds but with our words. How you say something can make a huge difference with tone and inflection. What would Beltane be without some sexual innuendo and overtones? So, of course some erotic poetry was read. This planted eroticism and suggestive words and images deep into the minds of those who attended and still sat in the dark under their blindfolds or closed lids.

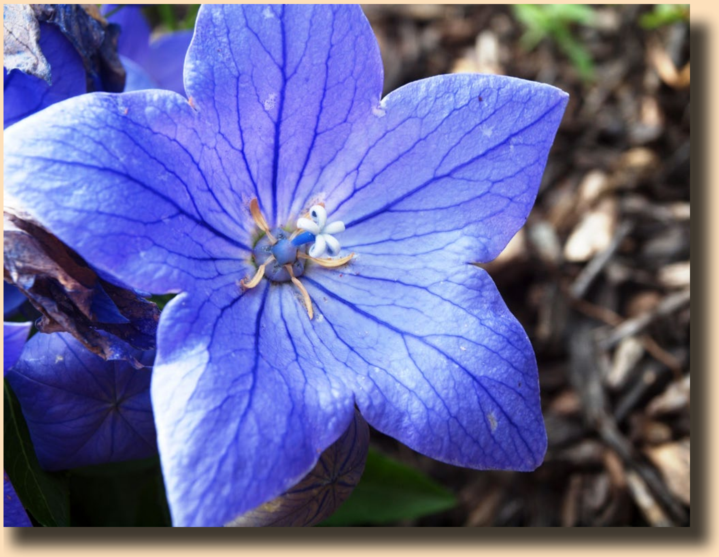
Smell and memories are very strongly linked together, more so than any other of our senses. Those with full

olfactory function may be able to think of smells that evoke particular memories; the scent of an apple orchard in full bloom could conjure up recollections of childhood picnics, for example.

Touch and taste are ignited with the many nerve endings on our fingertips, inner wrist, neck, inner arm, cheek and lips as well as many other parts of the body. The skin is a whole open canvas in which to explore texture, temperature, and pleasures.

After these senses had been teased and tantalized, the question was then asked, "How much do you trust me?" Trust is a huge factor in exploring the senses with another person. By now, most had gotten to know some aspects of me if they did not know me before. A full picnic basket of covered goodies was then taken around to each blindfolded person as they were instructed to either open and extend out their hand or open their mouth. Again, their allergies and aversions were asked of, and then an item was selected from the basket and either placed in their outstretched palm or passed between parted lips. At times, a caress of the item upon their skin was in order first to tease them and prepare them for what item they were going to be re-introduced to. Once given, each person, while still wearing the blindfold or keeping eyes closed, was then instructed to describe the item without saying what it was.

After having heard the erotic poetry, of course, each word used in describing the item they were given elicited quite the sensual and sexual innuendos and images, evoking and erupting into much howls of laughter and fun. The blindfold was then allowed to be removed as they could watch each of their friends in succession receive and describe their item and watch the facial expressions as well.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The items given out varied from person to person, whether it was an edible item which was for any of those who parted lips for a treat, or if they opened their palm for a more tactile experience.

As the sensuality of Beltane came alive and the session ended, each person was invited to allow this unfolding to continue throughout the weekend with their memory holding what the eye, ear, lips, mouth, and skin had gained.

Wanda is a Druid with the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. Recently moving to Maine with 46 acres of mostly woods, she plans to organize Druid getaway weekend retreats in the future. A student of the sensual arts of erotic poetry, dance, alternative lifestyles, and upcoming Chuluaqui-Quodoushka, Wanda enjoys the many vast explorations in spiritual sensuality.

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News Features

ABOUT THOSE PAGAN TO PAGAN WARS

By Michael R. Gorman

May I see a show of hands from all of you who have been enmeshed in a so-called "Witch War"? The hands of those who have been affected by one recently? Those who are currently being affected by one? Now may I see the hands of those of you who would love to see our Pagan rituals and workings heal the Earth in a powerful way in the name of the Mother Goddesses?

What do these questions have in common? Aye, therein lies a tale!

Some years ago, a new networking organization for Druids was born in Northern California. As with most Pagan organizations, its birth was not an easy one, and there were internecine conflicts that had the potential to destroy the group before it took its first breath. Largely due to the quiet wisdom and diplomacy of (OBOD Chosen Chief) Philip Carr-Gomm, and the desire of those involved to make magic together, the conflicts were dispelled, and the birth was a healthy one. The First Annual Gorsedd of this organization took place as planned on the Lughnasadh weekend in the coastal mountains above the Monterey Bay. And what a gathering it was! Druids from around the nation met for an extended weekend to share collegiality, celebrate the revival of our ways, study, and do ritual to heal the earth. The healing of the earth was our theme, and we had that theme in mind in ritual, in our songs, in our communing with the magnificent redwoods around us, and in our conversations with each other. In our main ritual on Lughnasadh, we called up incredible healing energy and sent it out to our Mother the Earth and her inhabitants in honor of our Celtic Mother Goddess Danu.

We left the magic of the Gorsedd on Monday,

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Author Michael R. Gorman

August 3 to return to the apparent world. Two days later, the California Fish and Game Commission voted to set aside 30 new offshore marine sanctuaries from San Francisco north, comprising 153 square miles of newly protected marine habitat, adding to the already preserved sanctuaries of the Monterey Bay where we had done our ritual. On that same day—two days after the Druids returned to their places among the people—a federal appeals court returned to a Clinton-era policy that blocked road construction in 40 million acres of pristine national forest around the nation. Many of us from the Druid gathering raised a glass to Manannán and Fand of the sea, and to Cernunnos and Druantia of the forest.

Also that week, yet another environmental victory was won.

At a Druid panel held in a redwood grove at the Gorsedd, a group that included John Michael Greer and Isaac Bonewits, we each spoke of our vision for healing our beloved planet. When it was my turn to speak, I spoke of an earth scar that I encounter every day in my hometown of Sacramento: the hills of bare stones left behind by the California Gold Rush in which miners literally washed the hills away, devastating the natural plants, trees, grasses and wildlife, leaving bare river rocks baking in the sun, and filling the rivers with brown silt that killed the fish in unprecedented numbers, most notably the California Salmon whose annual breeding run was disrupted because their nesting waters were thick with silt and their nesting areas covered with mud.

The American River that is a short walk from my home was at the center of the devastation, it being the river in which gold was first discovered in California. In recent years, gold hunting hobbyists have begun using powerful dredging pumps to suck up mud and silt and sand from the river bottoms to sift out the small flakes of gold still found in places on California's rivers. These weekend gold seekers pour the silt and sand and mud back into the rivers, leaving huge clouds of particulate as dangerous to fish as ever.

Well, on the Thursday after the Gorsedd, responding to a lawsuit by the Karuk tribe (ironically almost wiped out by the 49er gold miners), the state legislature passed and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill immediately halting all recreational dredging until an environmental study can be done to determine the affects this dredging has on the recently devastated annual Salmon Run, a fish at the center of the Karuk way of life. Environmental groups and salmon fishermen and other tribes joined the Karuk in supporting the bill by Democratic Senator Pat Wiggins from Santa Rosa. We Celts hold the Salmon sacred as the source of wisdom, and we owe a great debt to the Karuk for halting a practice that endangers them. We again lifted our glasses to the Goddess of the American River, to Danu of the rivers, and to our Native American Salmon-loving cousins, the "other people of the circle"! Sláinte!

So there you have it: healing ritual by Druids in the mountains above the Monterey Bay, and within three days (love that number, three!), three major environmental victories were signed, sealed, and delivered, touching the whole nation. Coincidence? I think not. I trust you will all raise a glass to Manannán and Fand of the sea, Cernunnos and Druantia of the forest, and Danu of the rivers and our Native American, Salmon-loving cousins, the "other people of the circle"! Sláinte!

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And for our next trick . . .

That brings me again to conflicts in the Pagan world like the gathering I mention above. The magic of that Druid gathering might have been preempted were it not for the help of Philip, a Druid elder of great wisdom. There are few things more heart-wrenching than an attack from a member of a community you call your spiritual home. I know this from personal experience many times over. I have at times been a target and at times guilty in this regard. I have learned that responding in kind is precisely the thing that gives an attack validation and power. Attacking back accomplishes exactly the opposite of what you seek, a return to peace and mutual respect.

The quickest and most effective way to disarm a misguided member of the community who attacks you is to give his attack no energy, not positive energy, not negative energy, nothing; and then turn instead to use all of your energy for doing good in the world according to your own path, regardless of what anyone says or thinks or does. You then will be responding to the attack proactively rather than passively in a way that the attacker cannot assail or take advantage of.

Attacking an attacker is like bombarding a fire with wood chips to try and put it out: not effective and a little bit insane! Once an attack has no counterattack to feed upon, it will end like the glow of a cooling ember, leaving only your good works behind. Thus, you will end the attack and enhance your own reputation at the same time. The attacker will, for a time, feed on those who are foolish enough to give her audience and encouragement, but the attack will inevitably die without you. (The hurt you may endure from the magico-gossip in the meantime is not anything that a simple self-protection spell with an overlaid mirror spell cannot squelch if you are not in the fray.) An archer cannot hit the bull's eye if the target has left the field.

All of that said, I have an idea that could help change our focus and our response to attacks in an empowering way. Given that we all have a limited measure of energy to exert toward the material world, and given that the energy bestowed in ritual from the deities and the spirits is sacred and not to be used frivolously, lets make a pact here and now in the national Pagan Community, by personal choice, of course. Let us pledge to use what energy is afforded us to speak and act in positive, constructive ways toward the members of the magical community. Leave the admonishments to the elders in quiet and respectful one-on-one diplomacy. No more dragging names into a public forum to win some perceived points in some unnecessary war of words. No more intentional attempts to wound each other. No more buying into the dominant culture's "us versus them, good guy versus bad guy" mentality, which is not the way of our ancestors.

As long as we fight each other, the mainstream culture does not have to lift a finger to suppress and oppress us; we do the job for it. Let us be conscious that with every breath of sacred air we breathe we have the opportunity to send out a curse or a blessing to the world. I think the world has enough curses already and is in desperate need of blessings. If one Druid ritual in the Santa Cruz Mountains can result in three major environmental protection initiatives succeeding within days of the ritual (in spiritual cooperation with the environmental activists who initiated the projects, of course), then think how powerful a united and healthy Pagan community the size of ours could be!

In the end, the best defense against a spiritual attack is not to counter-attack, but to counter-act, just as the best end to war is to engage in acts of creation, the opposite of war. If we make creation and love and harmony our daily mission, those who would seek power through disharmony and hateful action will find themselves in a place that is not very conducive to their bitter working. And we will be able to go our merry ways without focusing on them or wasting energy on them at all.

Whatever your spiritual path, there is a pledge taken often by Druids that applies to us all. I challenge you to speak this pledge before the Gods and Goddesses. We did so at that powerful Druid ritual I described earlier. I challenge you, when you are tempted to attack another Pagan, to recite again this pledge—not by rote, but with a humble and open spirit. I challenge you, when you are attacked by another Pagan, to respond only with this pledge, and thereby disempower the attack by refusing to validate it by engaging with it. Say the pledge. Then respond with love and healing on the air you breathe out. If someone attacks you on line, respond by sending a copy of the pledge. Here it is, the pledge:

We swear by peace and love to stand
Heart to heart and hand in hand.
Mark oh Spirit* and hear us now,
Confirming this our sacred vow.

Perhaps if we say the pledge honestly enough and often enough when it applies, we will begin to live by it.

PostScript

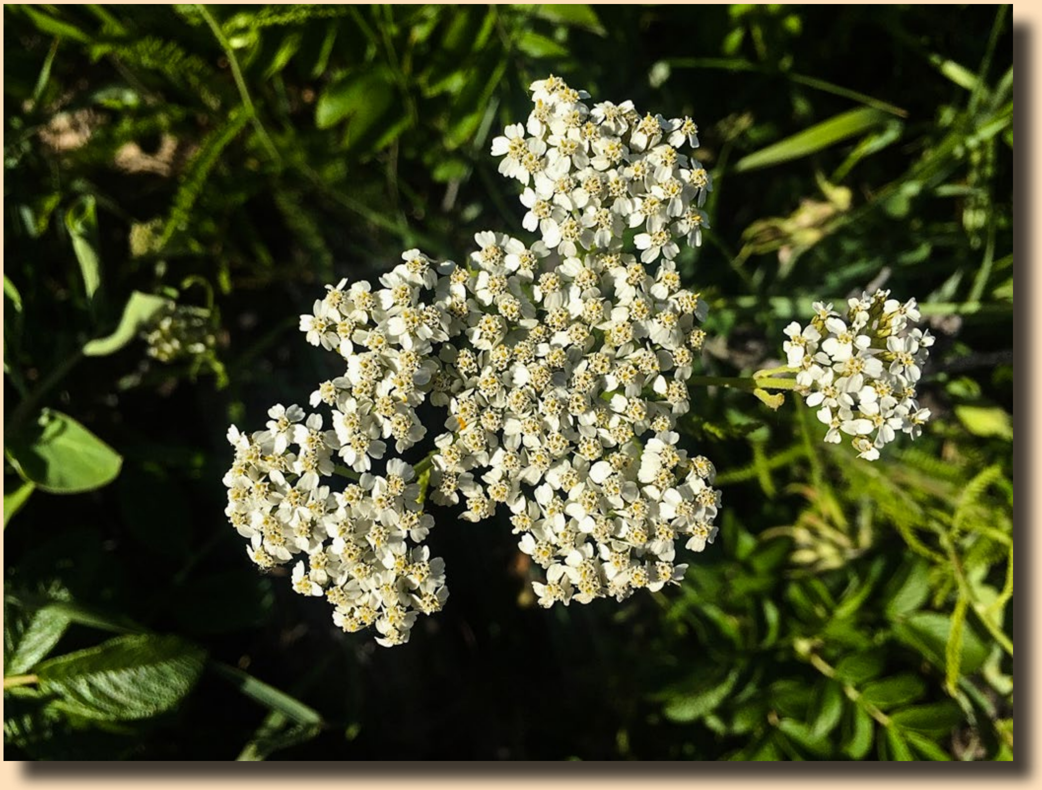
The phrase "Witch Wars" may have some nice alliteration that flows tripping off the tongue, but it is not accurate. All Pagans have experienced these ugly conflicts. A more fitting title would be "Pagan to Pagan Wars." I mean, give the witches a break! For those of you who miss the lyrical alliteration of "Witch Wars," perhaps we should start calling the Pagan to Pagan Wars "PP Wars." PP Wars kind of puts such conflicts in their rightful place.

* Feel free to substitute "Goddess" or a deity's name, or any other reference to the Ever-Living Ones with which you feel comfortable. And do not take lightly a vow made before your spiritual guides and deities.

Michael R. Gorman is a Druid in the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids tradition, founder of the Sacramento Grove of the Oak, author of The Celtic Philosopher's Stone, and host of the radio show The New Tribal Mind that airs on KUBU Radio 96.5 FM in Sacramento, or online at www.accesssacramento.org on Wednesday evenings at 8:00 pm PST.

YARROW IS THE FLOWER OF PROTECTION

BY SARAH FUHRO



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Yarrow is the flower of protection. I offer her essence to clients like an umbrella when trouble rains down. As an astrologer/flower essence practitioner, I use her soul pattern, held in the flower essence I make from her blossom. Herbalists use her chemical content for a myriad of issues around blood and circulation. Aroma therapy calls upon her powers to reduce inflammation and to cleanse and detoxify.

As a flower essence, she shields us from negative psychic influence and helps create boundaries for people who have lost them. When I offer Yarrow to a client, I am offering the protection of the hero and healer Achilles. Her botanical name, Achillea millefolium reflects his connection to this ancient plant friend, Yarrow. Some say it was into Yarrow tea that Achilles was dipped so he would be immortal! She is a shield from allergies and other toxins in the environment, and more recently used for the treatment of Lyme disease. Yarrow is also a powerful essence for those who heal or counsel others, but who lose themselves in the process, a form of soul loss, similar to blood loss.

Yarrow’s official name, *Achillea millefolium*, speaks of Yarrow’s power to staunch bleeding. Chiron the centaur, the great healer taught Achilles to use this plant on the battlefields of Troy, for Achilles was immortal, yet his soldiers were not. His tender care and compassion for his wounded comrades is as well known as his heroism in battle. Yarrow has been used all over the world on open wounds. Her use in battle has given her names like Soldiers’ Woundwort, Knight’s Milfoil, Herbe Militaris, Staunchweed, and Sanguinary. Yet for all her connection to the wounds of war, she is sacred to Venus, she who turns her back on battle. Perhaps she is sacred to Venus because Yarrow must have also been used during childbirth to halt bleeding and detoxify! The daily heroism of childbirth is not recorded in epic poetry, yet the blood and life force of Mars and the love power of Venus are coiled within it.

© Bruce Lhuillier

Yarrow is also used to lower fevers and to lift depression. So there is a strong sense of the element of Fire about this plant. She cures fever (related to Mars) and wounds of war (blood is associated with Mars). Yarrow tea helps with digestion, her oil with arthritis and joint pain and inflammation are all issues of heat. She belongs to Venus, who is ‘hot’ in another way! The power of Fire to heal and warm us as well as burn us, is why this element is central to every ritual, and lifts our spirits. Include Yarrow when you make an amulet, for she is most of all protective!!

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Like so many healers, Yarrow is a common plant, who grows in meadows and by the roadside. She blooms from June to September, easily available to those who need her. She made herself known to humans early on. Yarrow has been found in a Neanderthal grave in Iraq 62,000 years old (Leroi-Gourhan, 1975)!

How often do we thank the plants who grow around us, offering gifts of health and happiness? Our ancestors used this plant frequently to save lives and to hear the voice of guides and gods. That knowledge was stripped away under pain of death during the witch terror, but now it is time to return to our friend Yarrow, and protect and honor her as she has offered protection to us in so many forms.

Yarrow has another aspect: divination and magic. She channels spirit guidance and voices. This side of her is reflected in other names: Devil's Nettle. Devil's Plaything. Bad Man's Plaything. Her use was suspect because the power of healing and divination are powerful tools of self-empowerment. As a few families closed in on earth 'ownership,' they found ways to control the rest of the population through religious and political terror.

As hunter-gatherers, we depended upon the land for sustenance and spiritual connection. Now it became the 'wealth' of the very few. Anything with spiritual power in Nature was designated dangerous and uprooted, which is why most people lost their herbal knowledge. The Green Man became the Devil who could lead you astray. Yet Yarrow remained an underground healer and diviner. She was part of the resistance of those who saw the terrible lie we still struggle to overcome.

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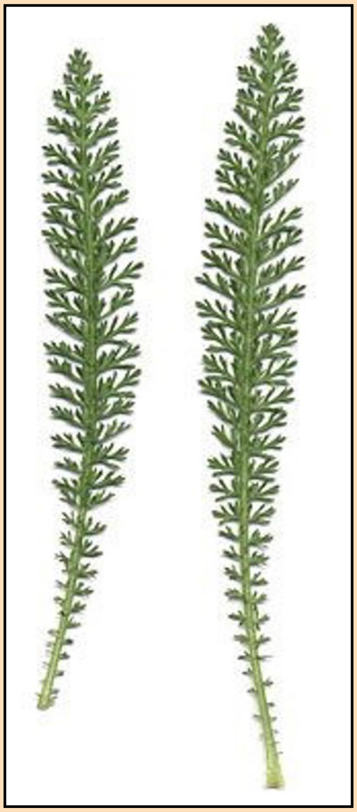
Adolescent girls have kept the magic of Yarrow alive: she was part of the ritual of those who wanted a lover.

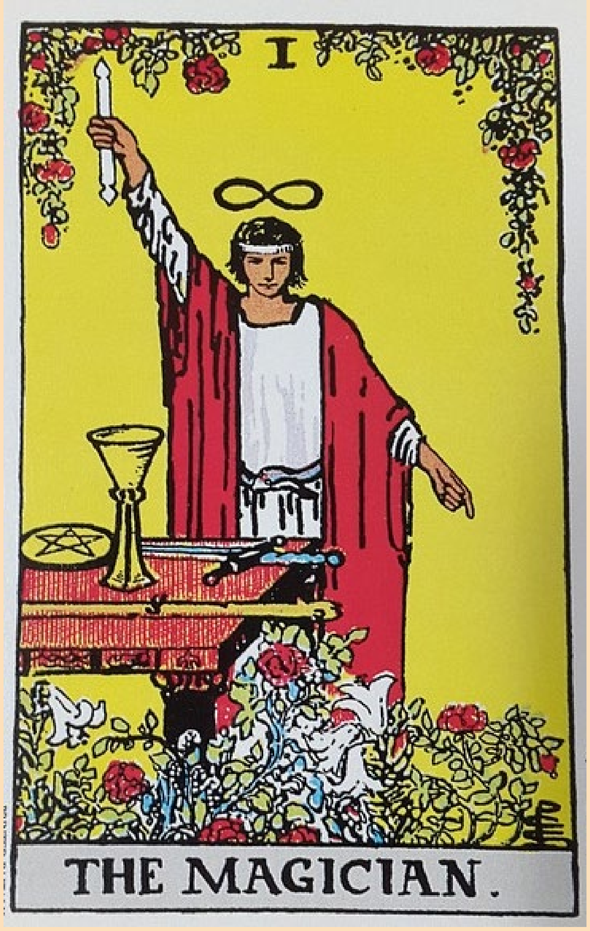
“Thou pretty herb of Venus Tree
Thy true name is Yarrow
Now who my bosom friend must be
Pray tell thou me tomorrow” (The yarrow, 1849)

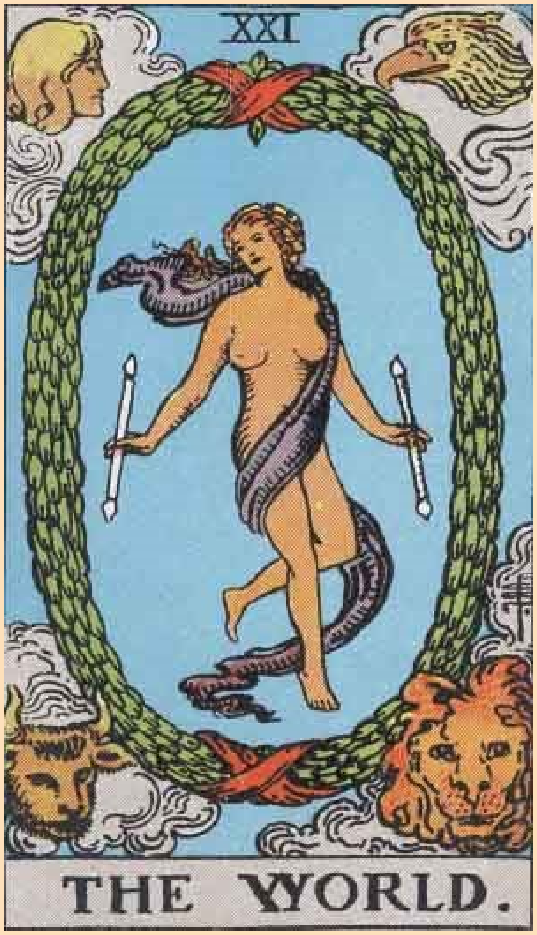
In the Hebrides, those who held Yarrow leaves across their eyes received ‘the second sight’ (Silverman, 1977). Oh, Yarrow you give us so many gifts!

In China, the I Ching originally used Yarrow sticks. "The oracle is consulted with the help of yarrow stalks. Fifty stalks are used for this purpose. One is put aside and plays no further part." - I Ching (Wilhelm, 1967)



In the Magician and The World Tarot cards, Yarrow is the tube/wand which transports the voice of the divine. Both the magician and the hermaphrodite dancer in the World card, receive the word of the god at one end, and send back messages to the Divine.





Some have even said the Oracle Pythoness at Delphi used Yarrow to hear the voice of Apollo. If you break a Yarrow stalk when it is dry in winter time, there is a chalky filler which falls out and leaves a perfect tube. Who will listen to the voice of spirit through her now? Will you gather her for a tea or make a flower essence from her lovely flowers or create an amulet with her woven into it for protection? So many treasures are available to us when we walk outside and look into the green fields and forests, the empty lots and the wastelands left behind. Next time you see her, dear Druids, honor her for the medicine she gave to our ancestors, to the link she makes with those who knew her powers to guard and guide us.

The rabbits who run riot through my garden just left a clue to the nature of Yarrow's gifts. They chewed flowers from my Yarrow plants this morning, but left them uneaten on the ground! There is something ancient about that flavor. Too bitter for bunnies, but a reminder that Yarrow aids in digestion like so many bitter plants.

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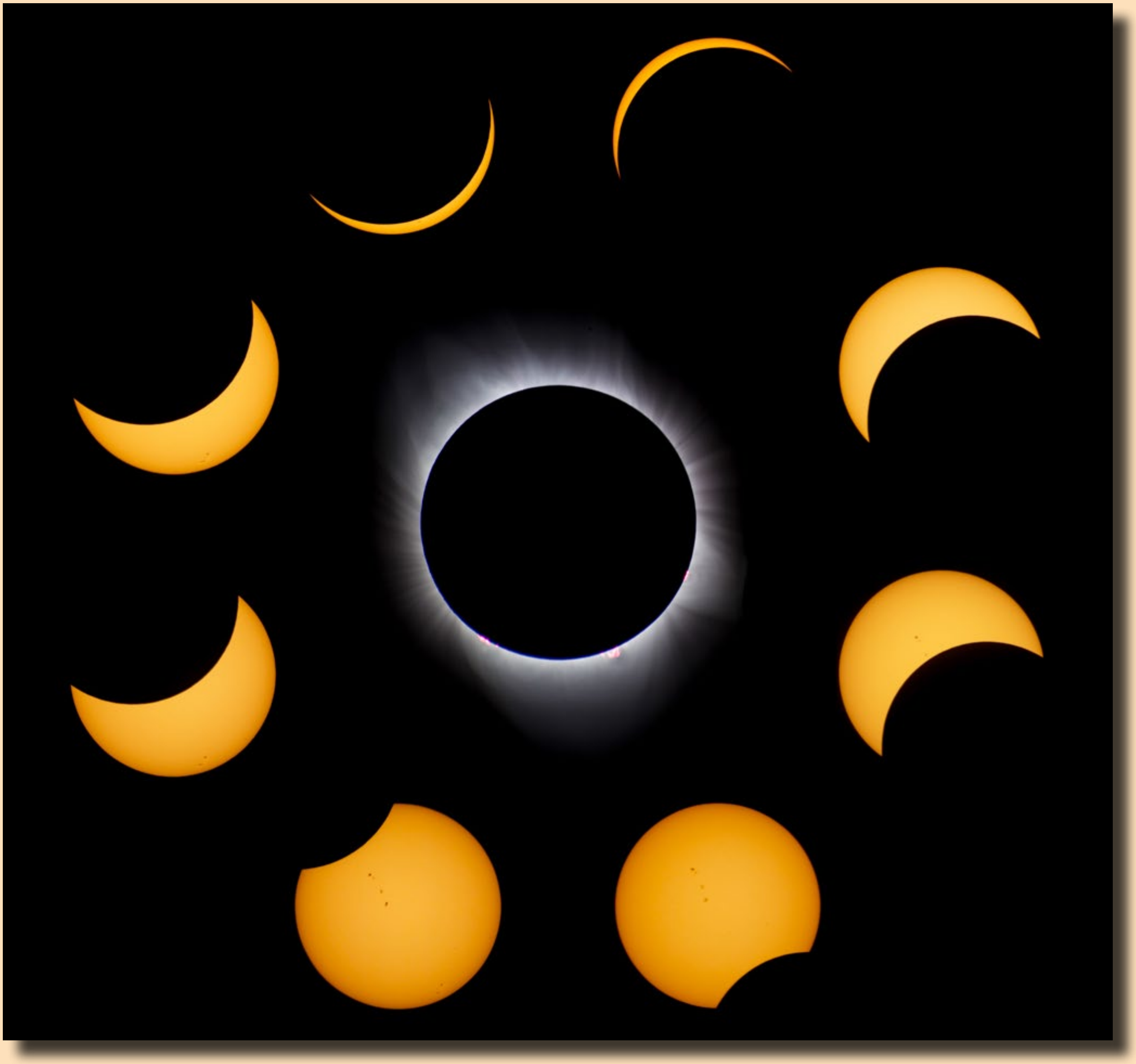

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NEWS FEATURES

THE WILD HUNT: NEWSGATHERING FOR THE PAGAN WORLD

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

When riots broke out in Charlottesville last month, The Wild Hunt (TWH) news agency was there covering the Pagan experience. In addition to firsthand accounts from Pagans attending the freedom rallies, stories also featured reactions from minority Pagans and what we can do to protest fascism and be safe (Schulz, 2017). When anything significant happens in the Pagan world, TWH is bound to be in the middle of it as the community's only breaking news service. With more than 300,000 unique hits a month, TWH covers anything of note from copyright infringement and major gatherings to murder and missing children.

While other media cover Pagans as an oddity, the 16 TWH writers, editors, and columnists are all part of the wider spiritual community in their cities and countries. They sometimes publish stories that would never make it to other media outlets, such as a Druid being accused of distributing child pornography. There are other stories TWH can make better sense of than the mainstream media. In 2015, Florida attorney Augustus Invictus made headline news when he ran against Sen. Marco Rubio for sacrificing goats and drinking their blood as part of his religion. While over 100 stories focused on the claims of ritual killing as barbaric, making him unfit to hold public office, TWH provided crucial context that there are "a number of religions that practice some form of ritual animal killing, slaughter or sacrifice" and the "hypocrisy of being horrified by animal sacrifice while dining on factory meat" (Schulz, 2015, para. 3). The issues involved are complicated, and few agree on the ethics, but nuances lost on traditional reporters are often covered in detail by TWH.

As a journalist, I was curious how TWH operates as such an elemental part of the community they serve, and so I initiated conversations with the editor for this story. Full disclosure: The dialogue uncovered a shared passion for journalistic integrity and the responsibility to protect our underserved populations. As a result, I am the newest member of their staff! This article was written prior to my officially joining the team.

Heather Green, TWH's editor in chief, tells us about the news agency and how they handle the challenges of covering a decentralized community with sometimes vastly different beliefs.

Tell me about the history of TWH. How did it start, and what were the intentions of the founders?

–THE WILD HUNT–
MODERN PAGAN NEWS & COMMENTARY

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HG: The Wild Hunt began as a daily blog in 2004 written solely by Jason Pizl. He had the idea that it would be nice if the Pagan community had a news-based site to go to everyday. Jason kept that blog up daily through 2012 when he brought on myself and another writer to assist. After that, we added more columnists to the weekend team. In 2014, Jason retired and I took over as managing editor. At that point, we shifted again, becoming a full-fledged news agency The Wild Hunt, Inc., with nonprofit status through Independent Arts and Media and 17 team members.

What is your history with TWH? Why did you want to join the team?

HG: I first learned about TWH and met Jason while working as public information officer [PIO] of the Covenant of the Goddess (COG) local Georgia chapter, Dogwood Local Council, in 2012. I also consulted with the Lady Liberty League. I then became PIO for the national COG. When I was doing PR for digital communications companies and the telecom field, it didn't jive with my spiritual life. Here I can merge my spirituality with my writing.

As noted above, Jason asked me to join The Wild Hunt writing team in 2012 when he decided to make the news blog more collaborative. He was bringing on a couple of new writers and asked me to come aboard. At that point, I was simply a weekly news writer. Over the following year, Jason gave me more responsibility managing the site, and I became his assistant in that respect. After I joined, we built up a team of professionals. His vision for what he wanted it to be is what it is now, but he couldn't do it alone. By 2014, he was ready to move on to other projects after 10 years of running TWH. He asked me to take over, and we worked to transition TWH from his leadership to mine over a six-month period. It was slow, but successful.

What do you see as TWH's mission and goals? Why?

HG: The Wild Hunt's mission is to "serve our readership daily with news and commentary, originating from within Pagan, Heathen, and polytheist communities or that which affect these communities." We play several roles, which are part of our mission. First, we serve and empower our collective communities with news using professional and ethical journalistic standards. "What are others like me doing or thinking or saying? What is happening in my religious sphere?" Second, we treat news coming from our community with a respect that is not typically given by mainstream media because our entire team is from our collective religious communities. Third, we are a window into our communities for the rest of the world. That is where point two becomes so important. We treat our work seriously and demand that respect for our team, for our readership, for our subject matter.

© The Wild Hunt

The Wild Hunt at their Paganicon 2016 social gathering:
(from left to right) Terence Ward, Crystal Blanton, Heather Greene (front), Cara Schulz, and Manny Tejada

What changes in the pagan community have you seen since TWH began? Where do you think we're headed and why?

HG: Since 2004, the community has grown significantly—if not in size, then in voice. This is predominantly due to the Internet and digital media, which makes connectivity and communication much easier. The general American population is more aware of Paganism and Heathenry to some degree, which makes it easier for people to come out. Our religious practices are still in the minority, of course. However, there has been an ideological shift that is challenging the status quo, and this has a lot to do with the Internet bringing people together and giving them the strength of community not seen before. This communication shift, which has allowed for the birth of The Wild Hunt, Patheos, and Facebook, has also led to the death of traditional media. It was sad to see Circle Magazine, an early player in Pagan news, fold.

Where are we headed? That is a difficult question. Right now with our current political climate, I'm not sure where anyone is headed. I read a Tarot card each day to answer that! Seriously, I believe that Pagan communities are in a flux period as the older, founding generations move on to the Summerlands, or whatever journey they take, and the next generation takes over with its own cultural implications. My generation is different than the founding generations. There is a cultural shift happening in that respect. How the aging of our practices and organizations affect the community will be interesting. Some will fold because they can't adjust to a changing world, while others will thrive and grow becoming our long-lived institutions.

Another point that needs to be made is that Pagan communities are diversifying. We are a creative bunch filled with independent souls. This is a good thing ... until it's not. It is my wish that our communities celebrate this ever-expanding religious diversity and not allow it to turn us against each other.

How has the current changes or revelations about our sociopolitical infrastructure impact TWH and it's goals?

HG: The current administration hasn't changed our mission whatsoever or impacted us because our goal is to report the news. So if it's Trump or Obama or Clinton, it doesn't change. Because of the climate having a religious undercurrent and implications that may affect religious liberty, we are more vigilant. We're having to pay attention to the constant circulation of religious discourse around this administration because it could affect our people. That's our primary goal—to report the information about and for our people. That's what sets us apart, we write news for an underserved religious population while trying to get to the truth. We pride ourselves on ethical journalism. I'm really proud of my team.

You've broken some news several times regarding Druid members. Without TWH, many would not have known about the charges ["dissemination of obscenities"] against Scott Holbrook for example. How did this occur? It appears you may have received some pushback, but recent events seem to vindicate your pursuit of the truth. I'd love to hear your thoughts about the case, the community reaction, and how if at all this impacts coverage of more negative stories going forward. To me, as a Pagan and a journalist, it is perhaps a welcome reminder of good journalism reporting from within a community.

HG: The Wild Hunt is first and foremost an objective news agency. We aggressively look for important news daily, 24-hours a day. We get tips, and we have sources. That serves as part of our primary mission. In terms of pushback, we get pushback all the time. News is not always pretty and comfortable, or what we want to hear, or write for that matter. When someone reads a news article in TWH, they are not reading our opinion, they are reading the facts as we know them, and my team works hard to get it right at any given point. It is not easy for us to check our opinions at the door when reporting. But we do. Do we always get it right? No, of course not. Neither does The New York Times or The Washington Post. But we will always retract, correct, and follow up. That is equally as important as doing the job right from the get go, and it is how ethical journalism works. As I noted earlier, our job is not to tell the readers how to think, but to empower them through facts to make a decision for themselves.

In terms of the Scott Holbrook story, we provided the Druid community with the facts from all sides. Remember, that was a progressive story not a single one, so our research and coverage lasted for over six months. It is not for TWH to judge Holbrook or anyone similar, but to relay to the community what was happening as it was happening. That is what we did. With that said, the Holbrook case is actually interesting because it demonstrates the limitations that TWH currently has, primarily fiscal in nature. We aren't a big news agency and most of our writers have other jobs. We don't have the funds to cover every story as we would like, and we often rely on verified sources. That is one of our weaknesses but one that is surmountable. With every year of growth and every dollar more we get stronger and more capable of direct coverage. That is better for us and for our readers. So I ask humbly if

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The Wild Hunt Managing Editor Heather Greene you enjoy TWH or want to see better coverage, donate and share our site so we can make that happen, because we will. That is our commitment, whether bad news or good news. We will be there and we will continue to do our job happily for the community—24/7/365.

You mention that traditional news sources do not cover the Pagan world as you can. Please elaborate.

HG: We're not afraid to dive into the different and ugly sides of our community and deal with the repercussions. That's what journalists do. The mainstream media treats the Pagan community as primarily a cultural oddity, so we are only covered when something is sensational or it's Halloween. We're not taken seriously unless we're involved in something salacious or illegal. To have our own news agency that treats our news with respect is important because we don't have to go through the same hoops and we already have appropriate context. We don't have to wonder what is Wicca, what is Asatru, or Druidry. We already know, so we can go right to the story. We treat the religions of the people we write about as sacred; it's just a given and written in to our style guides and policies. Much of our community-based news would otherwise get ignored.

We're like the Christian Post of the Pagan world. One of our missions is that we serve as a connection point to the pagan community worldwide. We have writers who are professional and respect the religions and life choices and identities of the people, so you don't have to worry about that when we're researching an article. We also use an objective and professional news format—the point in this is to give mainstream media and the general population a window into the pagan community within a basic format they can understand. It lends a legitimacy without sacrificing who we are in spirit.

What are some of your favorite stories?

HG: The most impactful story I wrote as writer for TWH was in 2013 on Tempest Smith, the 12-year-old who killed herself after being bullied. She was the daughter of a woman who was lesbian and Pagan. I talked to the wife of the biological mother, who had died of cancer. The stepmother had found Tempest hanging. I talked to her for over an hour as she recounted the story; I cried writing it.

Other stories that stick with me are the obituaries, but I call them Memorial posts because they are celebrations of life. I love writing them because I get a chance to look at someone's life from the point of view of those who loved them. It gives me a chance to dance in someone else's world.

One of our most popular articles has been on depression that we published in January 2015.

When I am not the editor, my beat is both art and religious freedom stories. Both areas are passions of mine. I love interviewing artists and finding out what makes them tick and why they do what they do. Equally, I love diving into the religious liberty battle grounds and the legal implications surrounding those.

Finally, anything else you would like to share with DM readers?

HG: I often wonder if we can actually define the pagan community. Is it even necessary? We aim to do the best we can with our resources. It is hard to cover a community that is changing and expanding like ours is. My wish for TWH is to continue to do what we do but do it better, and to expand with this ever-changing community—to provide decent and solid coverage.

Also I would like to remind your readers that we are always willing to look at submissions: new viewpoints, all perspectives, community-based events, news tips. We rely on the community and our readership. We're there for them and we want to be part of their lives. TWH is a service first and foremost and doesn't exist without readers and supporters.

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INTERVIEW WITH DAMH THE BARD: MUSICIAN, PENDRAGON, DRUID, PART 2

BY DAVID NORTH

> *"Yes, I am currently working on the first of four albums*, and I was doing some of it today! It's a very different departure than my usual stuff."*
>
> *-Damh the Bard, OBOD Pendragon*

CLICK ON THE SPEAKER TO LISTEN TO THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW**

PART TWO

(For part one of the interview, please see the Winter/Spring 2017 edition of Druid Magazine.)

David North: As [OBOD Chosen Chief] Philip [Carr-Gomm] said once, he views us as being in somewhat of a "Druid renaissance" at the moment. Do you agree with that assessment—the Druid Renaissance—or what do you think the path of Druidry is right now?

Damh the Bard: I get the feeling that the renaissance started in the 70s and late 60s, to be honest. I think I can put the Druid renaissance—I can put that alongside the growth of Reclaiming with Starhawk and the growth of Circle Sanctuary with Selena Fox and *Drawing Down the Moon* with Margot Adler—and all those things—and the Greenham Common protests here in the U.K., then the road protests here in the U.K., and also the growth of the new-age travelers back in the 80s. I think it's been a kind of gradual snowball effect; and I think what I'm starting to see now is that movement coming of age, if anything. I think we're still living within the renaissance of it, but I think it's starting to come of age where we're now saying, "Well, we're here. We've been here for 30 or 40 years now: What are we going to do?" And I think that's why you see things like Selena Fox, Cat and Circles, and the Lady Liberty League campaigning for the pentagram to be placed on the tombstones of fallen soldiers in the United States. We're starting to see those kinds of movements—of what was a fledgling Paganism—start to take itself seriously as a proper and real spiritual path in this modern time. I think the knock-on effect of that is that people are losing their tolerance of online "bitchcraft," and "bitchcraft" in general. It's becoming less important. The detail is becoming less important, and more about the common ground to me: That's where we are finding our strength, I think.

David North: Do you have an idea where you see the movement going?

Damh the Bard: I see a growing acceptance of it alongside the other major religions, I think. That's what I'm observing. There've been movements here, and now Pagans and Druids are meeting alongside other faiths—interfaith network meetings here in the UK—and I'm pretty sure that kind of thing is happening in the U.S. as well. The only thing I don't want to see is Paganism conform to the degree that it loses its teeth! (laughter) Does that make sense? So basically, there are things we do with smoke and magic and pentagrams and rituals and things like that, that are strange. I wouldn't like to see those things disappear just to become accepted within modern society. I think that if society accepts Paganism, it has to accept it with all its weird stuff as well as it's sensible, life-affirming, environmental focus. So, talking to trees is odd to a lot of people, you know, but we do it all the time.

David North: Going back to the art and the music, are there other Pagan/folk artists out there that you're a big fan of that speak to you, personally?

Damh the Bard: There are. There are bands that have influenced me: Silver on the Tree from Glastonbury, for instance—a band from the early 90s—and the Space Goats, who are another band that many people won't have heard of, but they were part of a tribe of people who travelled between the road protest movements in the 90s as well. Really earthy music that tells the story of the land. I was blessed to be able to play a Pagan music festival in Georgia in May last year, called Calderafest; and there I managed to meet up with other people who have influenced and who I love dearly—and have played at other festivals. I've been to the Michigan Pagan Gathering, Circle Sanctuary's Pagan Spirit Gathering, the Florida Pagan Gathering… I've played a number of events in the States, so I've met a lot of the Druid-Wiccan-Pagan musicians from the U.S. You know, S.J. Tucker is just a beautiful being and an amazing song writer, so, you know, I love her. Arthur Hines—one of the members of Emerald Rose, for instance—he's an amazing story teller and Bard. So, there are loads—and Tuatha Dea, for instance. They're from Tennessee and an amazing, amazing Pagan band from the States. What I love about Druid/Pagan musicians—and this isn't across the board, there are still a couple that are… different—but on the whole, there is no competition between any of us. We all love each other's work and support each other because what we're singing about is the same things that we all love about the land and about our traditions. So, that's a very long answer to say that pretty much every Pagan musician is an influence on me, and I listen to their music, and I can't think of many that I don't listen to.

David North: I loved your version of

Scarborough Faire on Sabbat [Damh's most recent album], and noticed you also referenced the lyrics in *On the Shoulders of Giants* that comes after it.[1] To me, compared with some of *your* other work, *Sabbat* seemed a lot darker than some of the previous ones—just my personal opinion. Do you disagree?

Damh the Bard: Well, it depends, what do you mean by "darker?" Maybe I should ask that.

David North: I suppose that's good—how do I define that? I'm kind of emotion-driven in that regard. Well, a lot of the imagery was, I would say, it ventured out from what I would consider traditional earth-Druid kind-of things into Heathenism, and some Wiccan-esque themes and—at the risk of creating a Druid stereotype—it tends to be a very light, positive, kinda happy movement. Humans are humans, but across the board I think that's a fair oversimplification. And some of those other paths can get into a little darker areas as far as the human experience and human condition. Does that help frame the question?

Damh the Bard: It does, absolutely, and that makes total sense. I think, if you look at my songs, they've always had elements of other paths in them. For instance, *The Cauldron Born* talks about things such as the witch's rune, and there's quite a few that have got that. *Antlered Crown and Standing Stone*, for instance—I've heard that album called a "praise" album. It's about praising the earth, you know, and that kinda thing. And it is. I think what happened with *Sabbat* is that I spent a lot of time looking at my journey, and, although I am a Druid, I see Druids… hmmm (laughs). This is what I mean by 'having one foot in the Order and one without' (more laughs). I see Druids as magicians, and not every Druid does, but I do. If you look at Gwidion from the *Mabinogi*, or Myrddin, or Taliesin, even, they are Druids to me, and they are also deeply magical and Shamanic. My Druidry is…when I really sat down and looked at it between those two albums of *Antlered Crown and Standing Stone* and *Sabbat*, I realized that I am a Druid, but I do have the beating heart of a magician, still. That same magician that I got when I was a teenager, I've never turned my eyes away from magic and from shamanism. So I guess my Druidry, if I was to take two circles—the Bard, for instance—which is the music, the power, truth, the story telling, the law, the ancient myths… as one circle, but then, I think, I have a huge overlap with the Ovate. The Ovate to me is the Druid witch, is the Druid magician, the Druid healer, the Druid diviner, the Druid shaman. I think that album *Sabbat* came from that central area where the circle of the Bard and the circle of the Ovate overlap, and I think that middle bit where those two circles overlap to me is the most exciting bit of the whole part! 'Cause it's there that you will find… the old mad Druid running naked through the forest on the back of a deer—you know that kind of thing. And I think that overlap is also where you would also find the witches Sabbat—the traditional witches Sabbat, which has that similar kind of ecstatic agency that allows people to… you know, you can contact the Divine through many ways: One of which is silent meditation, but one which is completely losing it around the fire with drums on a full moon. I think my head was probably in the full-moon magic "losing it" (laughs). Does that make sense?

© David North

Damh the Bard rocking the house at OBOD's 50th Anniversary celebration, Glastonbury, UK

David North: It does! And I do remember dancing around a fire with you summoning Cernunnos at one point.

Damh the Bard: Well yes! And I'll tell you what, that ritual is not something you would normally experience at an OBOD event, I didn't think. And I loved it! I loved the fact that it was so overtly "Horned God." You know that's right up my street (laughs). It isn't up everyone's street—I've got to say.

David North: To touch on the music one last time, is there any particular—for lack of a better word—ritual or process you go through when you prepare to write songs for a new album?

Damh the Bard: I don't have a regular process that I do. What I tend to do is I always have my iPhone handy when I'm twinklin' around on my guitar. While I'm just noodling, they call it, while I'm noodling on the guitar, I'll come across a melody and I'll just record it. So I have an iPhone full of melodies that one day will fit lyrics that I'm writing and stuff like that. So that's part of the process. The other one is that—only two of my songs have been different to this—every other song I have written I've got the tune first. Then I say, what's this tune about? What's this melody remind me of? That will lead to the lyrics. There have only been two songs that have been the other way around, which is I've written the lyrics before I've got the melody.

David North: Can I ask what those are?

Damh the Bard: Yeah, that is *Only Human* was one of them. And uh, oh, um …what was the other one—gosh—it's a good question! *Only Human* and… *Down in the Garden*. Now if you listen to those, they're quite similar with their finger-picking style and stuff like that. But all the others have been—I've got a melody and hook for a chorus and all I'm doing is sitting there going [sings, "la la la la la la la la…"]. Then I'll kind of go, now what's this song about? And usually it'll tell. And sometimes it doesn't; and if it doesn't, then I'll just put it away and wait for that to come along at a later date. I will also say that when I recorded *The Cauldron Born* back in 2008, I thought that would be the best album I ever made. I listened to that back and thought, I bared my soul on that album; and I thought, 'that was it,' I probably would never make an album like that again. Which is why I then went onto a live album, and then *Tales from the Crow Man*. It took a lot for me to get back in the studio because I just wondered whether or not I've said everything I wanted to say. When I finally went back in the studio and recorded *Antlered Crown and Standing Stone*, it was a very different vibe—like I say it was more of a 'praise' album. I was quite worried when I released that what people would think. I liked it—I wouldn't record stuff that I didn't like, but I didn't know how it would be received. But it was received beautifully. And that—having that go out there completely freed me of those shackles of *The Cauldron Born*. So when I recorded *Sabbat* I just went for it—and which is probably another reason why…there's a certain amount of freedom in *Sabbat* that is back, in my opinion anyway.

David North: OK: Gotta ask this, 'cause the wife said so. Nicole would like to see a Yule album (laughter). We sometimes miss our holiday albums from other religions. So has anyone ever asked you that before?

Damh the Bard: Yes, they have, and I've written a Yule song—*On Midwinter's Day*—and in truth, that song probably says everything I would ever want to say (laughter) about one festival. Do you know what I mean? Although the rest of the world is saying that this is the most important festival—the Winter Solstice is an important festival—but it's no more important to me than Beltane or Lughnasadh or Samhain or any of the others. So if I was to do an entire album of Yule songs, I'd probably have to do also an entire album of Imbolc songs and an entire album of…

David North: And, I'm sorry, the problem with that is, uh…what? (Laughter)

Damh the Bard: Well if you look at some of my (songs): I've got an Imbolc song with *Brighid*; I've got a Yule song, *On Midwinter's Day*; I've got a Lughnasadh song; I've got a summer solstice song with *Noon of the Solstice*; I've got a Samhain song with *Samhain Eve*. So I've written songs about each individual festival, but whether or not I could wring out an entire album on one thing, that would be—I'm not sure how honest that would feel, to be honest with ya.

David North: So how do you balance your time between music, your obligations to the Order, your not-so obligations to the Order, and your social and environmental activism? There is a lot you do. Does it just happen when it happens, or do you sometimes have to pick and choose?

Damh the Bard: I guess it was about 2010–2011, I realized that I needed another Dave if I was going to do everything that I was trying to get into my life. And there wasn't one. So I had to start saying 'no' to things, which is always difficult 'cause you want to say yes to everything, don't you? You always do—you want to say yes to everything. But you have to learn how to say no, I think, when suddenly you get that busy. Also, for a number of years there was a separation between my musical life and the Order, but I think that utterly disappeared when I started Podcast to be honest with you because people now know me just as much through being a Druid and being a Podcaster as they do being a musician. So there is no separation. When I go to a festival, I would have been booked to play some music in the evening, but now they say, "Will you also do a couple of workshops?" and "Maybe you'd like to run a ritual?" and all that kind of stuff. So now, the Order, my political views, and my music, and my family, with Cerri and my kids, and everything… they are just my life now. It's just a beautiful tapestry of exciting, wonderful things, and I think—every day I wake up and think I'm the most-luckiest man in the world to be to be able to use this life. So, you know, I thank the gods every day, and never ever take it for granted.

David North: Do you have any themes in mind for a next endeavor? Are you working on anything?

Damh the Bard: Yes, I am currently working on the first of four albums*, and I was doing some of it today! It's a very different departure than my usual stuff. This next album is not going to be a collection of songs: It's going to be an audio book, dramatization, and music of the first branch of the *Mabinogion*. I've written all of the spoken word, and so there will be a lot of storytelling, which will have—like a film score underneath it, but every now and again that storytelling will blend into a song about that particular moment, as well, in the story. This is just the first branch, and there are four branches, so this is going to keep me busy for at least the next four years! What I'll probably do is do the first and second branch of the *Mabinogion*, and then have a break and do a Damh the Bard song album, and then go back to the third and fourth branch after that. So that's five years' worth of recording, so, I'm going to be busy.

David North: No doubt! I look forward to that—it sounds exciting.

Damh the Bard: Yeah, well it's very different, and it's something that I've always wanted to do since I first picked up a mandolin and started to look at this bard—and a Celtic harp, as well, obviously—and I think it was when I recorded *Ceridwen and Taliesin* on *Antlered Crown and Standing Stone*. When I recorded that; and it's got that element of storytelling, it's got that element of poetry, and of song—in that one song to tell that myth. I thought, wow, maybe I'm ready to tackle this now. Only time will tell if I'm right.

David North: I didn't realize—I know you've been playing since you were a kid, but I didn't realize you picked up the mandolin.

Damh the Bard: Yes, for my albums I play guitar, I play bouzouki, mandolin, Celtic harp, drums, bass, vocals… You know, if you look at my recording studio, it's just got a ton of different instruments here!

David North: I'm learning the mandolin. I only know a handful of songs, but my first song was "Lughnasadh." That was the first one I did.

Damh the Bard: I love the mandolin. It's so portable. It's one of the archetypal bardic instruments to me. You know, sitting around a campfire and hearing somebody sing to a mandolin is a very magical thing. So, good luck!

David North: Thank you! Thank you very much. I enjoy it. Any parting thoughts or bits of wisdom you'd like to leave with Druid Magazine readers?

Damh the Bard: Oh, God, that's always a hard question, isn't it? And I probably should have thought of something because you did give me these questions in advance (laughter).

David North: I'll let you take a 'bye' if you want.

Damh the Bard: No, no, no. I'll just say, you know, that it might be a difficult time in the next few years. And I think the thing that I'd ask people to bear in mind is to always look for the common ground—always look for what we share rather than be wound up by a hysterical media show to try and divide people. I think one of the beautiful things that provides that common ground is our spiritual path. So, you know, let's just stay focused and stay centered and I'm sure it will be fine.

David North: Let's hope so.

Damh the Bard: Yeah, yeah.

David North: Well, Dave, thank you very much for your time. This has been a real honor and pleasure. And all the best you, and best to Cerri, and, I haven't met your kids, but best to your kids as well.

Damh the Bard: Yeah, and hopefully one year soon we'll be back at ECG [East Coast Gathering], and we can meet up and say hello again.

David North: That'd be awesome; and

***If you cannot see the audio controls, either click on this link instead, download the pdf, or see other technical resolutions here*

maybe someday there's a Mid-Atlantic Gathering [MAGUS] in your future.

Damh the Bard: That would be cool. That would be cool. All right, brother.

David North: All right, Dave. Thank you.

Damh the Bard: Cheers.

David North: Cheers, bye bye.

David North is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. He is an organizer of the Northern Virginia-based Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle, founder of the NoVA Pagan Moot, and co-visionary of the OBOD Mid-Atlantic Gathering, U.S. (MAGUS). He writes, edits, and participates in public rituals locally and regionally.

* **Pre-order is available for Damh's new album!**

Y Mabinogi

The First Branch

Release date: September 26, 2017

Watch the trailer here

IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

TRANSFORMATION

DEADLINE: DEC. 1, 2017

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[1] *Author's note*: I mistakenly referenced the wrong song here: The *Scarborough Fair* lyrics are referenced in *Iron from Stone* on Sabbat.

DRUID ORGANIZATIONS RESPOND TO CHARLOTTESVILLE

From the official Facebook page of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids:

Membership of the Order, as you can see on our website, is open to followers of all faiths and none, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or ethnic origin. This statement reflects the values we consider central to our philosophy: of tolerance and inclusiveness that completely reject expressions of racism, facism and homophobia. OBOD is a community, a mystery school, that celebrates life in all its beauty and diversity, that seeks to protect and preserve the Earth, and that focusses on teaching Druid spirituality for the times we live in - emphasizing the virtues of compassion and respect for all of life. For this reason, following the recent events in Charlottesville, USA, we utterly condemn the ideology of the white supremacists and Neo-Nazis who have caused such suffering there.

August 16, 2017

For Immediate Release

Ar nDraiocht Fein: A Druid FellowshipTucson, AZ

Official Statement on Charlottesville Incident

From the ADF Mother Grove:

Last Saturday violence erupted in Charlottesville, Virginia. Neo-Nazis and white-supremacists marched in the name of hate, intolerance, and violence. Heather Heyer, one of the many counter-protestors, died standing up to these monsters and many others were injured when a car was deliberately driven into the crowd.

We as a nation and a world stood up to Nazi ideology more than 70 years ago, and defeated it with the mentality that we would never see it return to power. Fast forward to today, and we see these racists no longer living in the shadows and causing violence, mayhem, fear, and death.

In response to this senseless tragedy, ADF's Member's Advocate reached out to those members local to Charlottesville and made sure they were safe. We will continue to work toward an inclusive environment and welcome people from all walks of life, ethnic origins, and races.

As a safe haven and a pagan church, ADF denounces the actions by these racists on not only on Saturday, August 12, but we denounce all of their past and future rallies of hate. We stand against their ideology of racism and intolerance. We condemn these groups for appropriating our ancestor's symbols for their own nefarious uses. As a church which uses Indo-European myth and symbology in our worship, we want to be clear that we stand opposed to these hate groups. We as a church we stand together with all the other pagan groups and churches in denouncing these white nationalists, and together we will work to prevent this cancer from ever returning.

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Living Druidry

THE MANY WAYS WE LEARN: TIPS AND TRICKS FOR THE WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

BY MOSS MAGILL

It's never too early to start planning for next summer's workshops at conferences, gatherings, and campouts. Learning is something that we all do on a regular basis, and, as there is a wide diversity of us all seeking teachings and knowledge in the 21st Century, it stands to reason that there are many different ways in which we learn. Learning styles depend on how we prefer to consume information, what we need in order to understand, and how our life experiences and cultures have formed our "classroom personalities."

© Edward Atkison Hornel

The fact is that we, as facilitators, all consume facts and concepts differently and so do our attendees! Since engagement is the key to learning, it is vital that we make the attempt to engage as many of our diverse participants as possible each time we present them with new material.

In the following essay, we explore typical learner preferences that show how attendees like to receive and apply concepts. We'll explore learner needs that inform how to deliver information that will engage an audience with the widest variety of learning styles. We will also discuss learner personalities that can be difficult or disruptive to the rest of the participants and how to handle these situations when they crop up in a workshop experience.

Learning Preferences

Let's begin by taking a look at some of the more common learning preferences that make up a typical workshop attendee population.

Expressive Learner. Expressive learners exhibit a great deal of enthusiasm for learning. They are creative and innovative learners who like to explore fresh ideas and alternative concepts. Expressive learners sometimes get frustrated with others who resist new ideas or "just don't get it." They like learning for the sake of learning, love to apply learning to new ideas, want to promptly use new material, and prefer the learning to be fast-paced. Expressive learners also talk more than listen during workshops, likely offering and exploring fresh ideas and alternatives.

Task-Oriented. Task-oriented people enjoy doing many things at once, and they take control of most situations. They are direct, independent, and extremely goal focused. They like training that is results-oriented and that emphasizes actions and concrete outcomes. Task-oriented people take control of group learning in simulations or other activities and can sometimes be very direct during interactive exercises. They can seem impatient with slow learners and may think some of the material is a waste of time. Finally, they tend to search for ways to apply learning to accomplish goals.

People-Oriented. People-oriented learners focus on feelings as well as ideas. They avoid conflict, prefer to build partnerships and networks, and have a difficult time saying "no." On the other hand, they like workshops to be fun and harmonious, preferring to learn with others who they allow to be in control at times during the learning process. A people person likes to have time to explore how the learning will apply to self and wants time to talk with others about new ideas. People-oriented learners often make new friends and connections during workshops.

Analytical. Analytical people are logical and objective. They feel comfortable with rules and standards and with things that are planned in advance. They like the learning to be thorough, accurate, and of high quality (e.g. no typos). They like to have time to absorb and analyze the material before applying it and prefer written materials that support the learning. Analytical people may ask for and provide in-depth answers during the workshop, trying to understand the learning background or research base. These learners also prefer to learn at a deliberate pace.

Learning Needs

In addition to learning preferences, attendees may also be aware that they have certain learning needs that are met by different delivery methods. These needs indicate the ways in which they take in, process, and remember information. Most people require a primary delivery method.

Visual Learners. Many participants have the need to see, watch, and observe information. Eyes are the key to learning. Delivery methods that are effective for visual learners are videos, PowerPoints, quick guides, and cartoons. **Analytical people** tend to be visual learners, prefering to read materials that support the meaning of the class content.

Kinesthetic Learners. Other participants are kinesthetic learners and need to interact with information. Hands and bodies are the keys to this type of learning. Incorporate activities such as hands-on exercises, mind-mapping, brainstorming, interactive handouts, and ritual to keep kinesthetic learners engaged.

Expressive people and **task-oriented people** tend to be kinesthetic learners. Expressive people like to apply the learning to their new ideas and task-oriented people tend to be results oriented, preferring training that emphasizes actions and concrete outcomes.

Audial Learners. The third and final learning need we will look at is for those who use hearing to process information. In this case, the ears are the key to learning. Music as well as verbal storytelling anecdotes, podcasts, and discussion are all effective delivery methods for audial learners.

People-oriented learners are definitely audial collaborators, preferring to discuss new concepts with others.

Managing Difficult Situations

With all of these varying combinations of learner preferences and needs, you are bound to have one or two attendees who could be classified as difficult. How do you handle these situations? The key to engaging difficult learners is to first identify them, and then have a bag of tricks handy that help you maintain control and engagement for all participants. Let’s look at some common difficult classroom characters.

The Prisoner. These attendees tend to not want to be there and will either be disruptive or will not participate. Consider if they have been forced in some way to come to the workshop and how to connect with them. You may want to give them a constructive job to do, such as serving as scribe for discussions or a part in a role-play.

The Strong, Silent Type. These attendees have a lot to offer, but they are shy and do not participate.

Always Right. These individuals dominate the conversation and have an opinion about everything. They feel that they need to get their way.

The Talker. Talkers won’t let others get a word in edgewise. They love the sound of their own voices. They may or may not be on topic.

The Boxer. These attendees want to challenge the facilitator’s credibility, to appear as the authority, or they perceive the class as a contest of egos.

We/ They. These learners will tell you, “I already know all this stuff.” They separate themselves from the rest of the participants and feel that they are above everyone else.

The Class Clown. Class clowns use humor to excess or at inappropriate times to gain attention or to reduce the credibility of the program or others.

The Naysayer. Naysayers often proclaim, “That won’t work.” They like to maintain the status quo. They frequently use the phrase "Yeah, BUT…"

The Disrupter. Disruptors are usually late or have an excuse for something else to take precedence over the time commitment to the class.

As facilitators, we have so many things to think about in order to provide a meaningful, engaging experience for all participants in our sessions! How do we please everyone? The fact is, we can't and we can't know the reasons some participants with potential become difficult in a workshop. But we can incorporate a variety of elements in one class and use some tried and true best practices to minimize difficult situations.

Over-Participation: One or more participants are commenting too much and/or are derailing the agenda or flow of the information delivery.

- ✧ Set up an agreement or set of ground rules before or as part of the session and refer to them when problems arise (see sidebar).
- ✧ Ask questions that require a simple yes or no answer.
- ✧ Ask the participant how the comment links to the topic.
- ✧ Solicit other opinions in the room about the comment.
- ✧ Summarize the key points of the off-track discussion, provide a smooth transition and move on.
- ✧ If you think the participant will take it well, compassionately indicate during a break that over-participation impacts the dynamics and contributions of the group. Let them know that balanced participation benefits the class in the long run.

Under-Participation: A participant is not engaged or is under-contributing to a discussion.

- ✧ Make sure the group's agreement (ground rules) includes permission for calling on participants by name.
- ✧ Use the person's name before asking a question to minimize the risk of embarrassment.
- ✧ Ask open ended questions that invite active participation, or pose a challenge/ scenario for group reaction. ("Let's suppose you have…" or "How might you apply…")
- ✧ Be sure to affirm the participant's input and use the person's name.
- ✧ Use polling to increase energy in the group and connect participants to the content. ("How many of you think…" or "Would you mind sharing how you might apply…)

Aggressive Behavior: One or more participant is making challenging remarks and creating discomfort among the rest of the attendees.

- ✧ Breathe! Remain neutral. Avoid defending yourself or the content;

don't take things personally.

- Maintain relaxed, non-defensive language.
- Seek to understand the concern. ("Maria, thank you for raising your concern. I'd like to understand your perspective. Tell me more about your concern.")
- Validate the concern and defer to the group. Give the group the power to resolve the issue or concern.
- Paraphrase your understanding of the concern. Make it okay to agree or disagree if necessary.
- Create a problem-solving approach. ("How else might we approach this challenge?")
- Feel free to call a break. Announce that after the break, the discussion will switch gears and introduce a new topic or activity.
- Never "call out" or demean a participant in front of the others, no matter how disruptive the behavior. If you do, the audience may side with the participant, even if they too find the behavior inappropriate. Protect the privilege of the platform by respecting individuals.

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It's unlikely that anyone can satisfy all the preferences and meet all the needs of every participant in all sessions 100% of the time! Consequently, unchallenged or unengaged learners may create a difficult situation. The best we can do is to handle each situation on a case-by-case basis using techniques that never demean or alienate an individual. It is always important to try to win the trust of difficult students and engage them as much as possible with the material.

Stay Curious!

How will you know what your participants' preferences and needs are? The easiest way to find out is to ask them! They will be happy to let you know! Staying curious about how your learners stay engaged will keep you interested in what you are doing and help keep your classes fresh, relevant, and fun!

Moss Magill has been a learning and development consultant for over 20 years. He is also an alchemist, poet, playwright, a member of OBOD, and a departmental editor for Druid Magazine.

ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES FOR SAFETY & SUCCESS

It’s always a good idea to establish ground rules that are generated by the group at the start of any workshop so that the participants feel a sense of safety and of ownership of the learning experience.

Tips:

- Ask for suggestions from the learners
- Record their ideas on a flipchart or on a PowerPoint slide
- Leave the list displayed during the session

Some examples of ground rules that could come out of your discussion:

- What’s talked about here stays here
- No cross-talk, backtalk or judgmental feedback
- Making sure each person has finished talking/ do not interrupt
- “Active listening”—listen to understand, not to formulate a response
- No touching without asking permission first
- Being respectful of all boundaries
- Setting up an energetic envelope within which we feel safe for participating

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Resource material for the article:

The Mind of the Facilitator,
produced but no longer available from BTS

PUBLIC RITUAL WORKSHOP PART V: RITUAL SOUL

BY DAVID NORTH

…And then there's that time when you're five minutes from ritual start, handing out printed copies of the script because the Beltane event has been so demanding that no one has had time to memorize their lines, and you come to the sinking realization that the printed script everyone now has in their hands is the original rough-draft and not the corrected, final version. What does one do? What can one do, but have the ritualists put their game-face on and press forward!

In this real-life example, there were a couple of tiny hiccups, all covered well, unnoticeable to all but the more experienced ritualists in the circle. Until… as Druid One began to unwind the circle to close the ritual, I—as Druid Two—realized mid-sentence that the lines I was in the middle of reading were mislabeled and supposed to be spoken by Druid One at the END of the unwinding. The dilemma: If I finished the lines, Druid One would be left with literally nothing scripted to say at the end of the ritual. Silence. So, I intentionally stopped speaking at the end of the phrase I was finishing. Suppress panic—insert pregnant pause—think quickly! The first thing that popped into my head was…

But first, welcome to the last installment of the ritual workshop, where we review a few snippets of hard-earned wisdom from previous segments and attempt to put all the disparate pieces together. Let's start with Dave's maxim on ritual performances, made up exclusively for this paragraph: "A good start does not guarantee a good end, but a bad start does tend to tip the scales in favor of a bad end." No pressure, right? Now let's review a few bits of wisdom from previous segments:

- Double check your materials, props, and ritual space. Then check again.
- Feel free to have a favorite ritual role, but step outside your comfort zone periodically and experience a different element or role.
- In fact, make a point to sometime not be a ritualist at all, and simply be a participant in your own religion!
- Ground yourself early, and often; and ground residual ritual energy into the earth or other appropriate receptacle.
- Breathe. Then speak so that you can be heard in your natural voice without yelling.
- Don't. Read. To. The. Script. Speak to, and make eye contact with, your audience.
- Move like you mean it.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Relax, and enjoy. Have some cakes and ale.

In this closing segment, let's take a moment to mention an aspect of ritual that is—in my experience—rarely discussed in terms of the group as a whole; and that is magical safety and security. As a celebrant, recognize that you are responsible for not only the quality of the magical experience, but also the safety and security—both physical and astral—of each participant. We discussed the phrase "…outside time and space" in the previous issue and what that meant in ritual terms: It is that feeling of being completely removed-from the physical world—a quasi-meditative state where one is prepared to receive the energy, blessings, or other spiritual inspiration. It is the goal of the ritual experience for many.

Do not take lightly that this wonderful, magical, meditative place is potentially also a very vulnerable place for a person to be in. For the ritual to be fully realized, it requires an environment of safety and trust; doubly-so in a public setting. As a ritualist, do not take your responsibility to protect others lightly, and understand that you are in a position of great responsibility that must never be betrayed.

© David North

Stone Circle on Roman Road Rowen, North Wales

Delivery is everything. Mostly. Here are a few final thoughts in that regard:

- Don't rush your speech or your movements, and don't be afraid to pause. What seems like eons of silence to a performer is often a mere moment of reflection for a participant. In guided meditations, I frequently force myself to stop talking, breathe, and count to ten… slowly.

- Memorize your lines when possible. At a minimum, be familiar with them. However, if reading, don't read into the book: Read to the audience. Hold the book low, glance at the lines as needed, make eye contact with the audience, then speak to them individually! Look, think, speak, look again. This rhythm makes all the difference in connecting with the participants.
- Don't be afraid to paraphrase, ad lib, or use creative expression in delivery. Be yourself: Use the words that speak to you naturally unless there is a reason to do otherwise.
- Most of all, have fun. Be fulfilled. Take pleasure in the service you are providing to others in your community.

So, to finish up the recent real-life story from the opening, there I was, with nothing I could say without leaving Druid One with nothing to say at the finish. What popped into my head was a common prayer sometimes used at ritual closings in my tradition. "Deep within the still center of our beings, may we find peace. Silently, within the quiet of the grove, may we share peace. Gently, within the greater circle of human kind, may we radiate peace." It was timed perfectly so that the last syllable faded as Druid One rejoined their place in the circle. Problem solved. One lesson to take away from the experience: Even if one doesn't memorize the entire ritual, always have something memorized that you can pull out of your pocket (or crane bag) in a pinch!

May that same still, quiet, and gentle prayer be with you as this series comes to a close. My hope is that it was as much fun to read as it was to write; and I invite you to share your thoughts, describe your own experiences, or weigh in on topics you feel were missed. Until then, I couldn't help but throw in one more exercise.

PRACTICUM

Think about your most powerful ritual experiences. Which held the deepest meaning for you, and why? Consider the elements that were in play at that time: What was the day and time, and where was the location? What season was it, and what was the weather? Who was there in the circle with you, and what was going on in your life at the time? Try to identify the personal "triggers" that help bring you to a fulfilling ritual experience—to attain that receptive, meditative state. How could you control, adapt, or communicate those triggers to create and share a similar experience for others?

VITAMIN C: PROTECTION AGAINST A MULTITUDE OF AILMENTS AND DISEASES

BY SHELLEY KENEIPP

When I was in my 20s, my doctor told me that one of the best things I could do for myself and my family's health was to take vitamin C on a daily basis. He stated that my family would have fewer colds, and, if we did get a cold, it would have a shorter duration. He also stated that wounds would heal quickly. In addition, he stated we would probably never get gum disease. So, we all took vitamin C every day, increasing the potency in the winter, as instructed by him. My family and I have remained in excellent health for all these years.

In this article, I am going to address the many other health benefits that vitamin C can provide. It is a par excellence supplement that can protect your body against all kinds of assaults from viruses, bacteria, and environmental factors especially if you also eat a wide variety of organic, non-processed foods, consume a wide variety of all foods in moderation, and stay hydrated. Instead of going in depth about how each of the following conditions is mitigated by vitamin C, I provide articles written on each claim, so you can read them for yourself. The resources will provide you with a deeper understanding of what vitamin C does and how it works in your body.

What Vitamin C Can Do:

- Lowers risks from high blood pressure:
  "Several studies have examined the impact of vitamin C on blood pressure. Vitamin C is an antioxidant, which helps neutralize cell-damaging free radicals. Research has shown that antioxidants can help to reduce high blood pressure, possibly by protecting your body's supply of nitric oxide, a molecule that relaxes blood vessels" (Mercola, 2009).
- Lowers risk of stroke: "Recent research shows that those with vitamin C deficiency are at an increased risk for hemorrhagic stroke. In an earlier study, people with high blood levels of vitamin C reduced their stroke risk by 42 percent" (Mercola, 2014).
- Lowers risk of number one cause of blindness, cataracts: "… A vitamin C-rich diet was linked to a 33 percent lower risk of cataract progression" (Mercola, 2016).
- Lowers risk for heart disease and early death: "Those with the highest plasma vitamin C levels also had significantly reduced rates of heart disease and all-cause mortality" (Mercola, 2015a).
- Effectively treats upper respiratory tract infections: "Kiwi fruits are exceptionally high in vitamin C, along

with vitamin E, folate, polyphenols, and carotenoids, and research published in the British Journal of Nutrition found that a kiwifruit-packed diet reduced the duration and severity of upper respiratory tract infection symptoms in older individuals" (Hunter et al., 2012). "Other foods high in vitamin C include: citrus fruits, red bell peppers, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, butternut squash, papaya, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes" (Mercola, 2015b).

- Increases the mobility and quality of sperm: " In one study, infertile men who were given 1,000 mg of vitamin C twice daily improved their sperm count, sperm motility, and sperm morphology. The researchers stated vitamin C could be important as an additional supplement to improve semen quality and increase chances of a natural conception" (Mercola, 2011).
- Reduces effects of chronic stress: "A high dietary intake of vitamin C may help reduce the effects of chronic stress by inhibiting the release of stress hormones, thus preventing these hormones from dampening the immune response" (Mercola, 2008).

If you are wondering how much vitamin C to take, I refer to Dr. Ronald Hunninghake. "Dr. Hunninghake is an internationally recognized expert on this vitamin. He got his start in this field about 22 years ago. His clinic is the successor to Linus Pauling and his work on vitamin C." Dr. Hunninghake states, "For the average patient, I… encourage them to take at least the Linus Pauling dose, which is one gram, twice a day, of vitamin C. Certainly you can do more than that. If you're suffering from chronic infections or chronic fatigue you can go ahead and gradually increase your dose up to what's called the bowel tolerance dose.* It's very safe. The idea that vitamin C causes kidney stones has been completely disproven. There have been several studies by urologists that have shown that is not an issue with high-dose vitamin C" (Mercola, 2010).

**Note*: Bowel tolerance means taking vitamin C until your body produces loose stools. Then, at that point, you can continue taking the potency just before the body produced the loose stools. This will depend on each individual's particular needs and the severity of the condition for which they are taking the vitamin.

One of the most famous researchers of high dose vitamin C treatment for colds and other diseases was Linus Carl Pauling (1901–1994), a physical chemist and peace activist who won two Nobel Prize awards; one in chemistry in 1954, and a second for his opposition to weapons of mass destruction in 1962. I highly recommend his book, How to Live Longer and Feel Better (1986).

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LIVING CONSCIOUSLY

PROTECTING OUR PLANET

BY LOLLY NICOL

One of our fundamental human needs is the ability to protect ourselves from various threats to our general wellbeing. This has been important since the beginning of time, and nowadays it may be more important than ever before. Although I am personally a believer that Mother Earth has her own ways of protecting herself—coming in the form of natural disasters and disease—I also believe that it is important for us as her inhabitants to make a notable effort to help protect her as well. We are fortunate to be able to take this task into our own hands, and there are countless ways in which we can make a positive impact on the environment.

BROWN
Clear Glass Bottles & Jars
Green Glass Bottles & Jars

Early on in my schooling, I remember learning “The Three Rs”: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Let’s briefly explore the basis of each term. ‘Recycle’ comes into play after items have already been created. ‘Reduce’ aims to prevent excess from being created (objects) or overused (resources) in the first place. ‘Reuse’ ties the two together by taking things that have been created and utilizing them multiple times to prevent the need for more. All three practices are beneficial; however, this article will focus on reducing and reusing as they relate to prevention and protection.

Grand gestures for our environment are important, but going grand isn’t feasible for everyone. I will instead share with you some practical suggestions of actions that you can take in your day-to-day life in order to combat the excessive waste we all generate through modern life.

In the Kitchen

- Decrease water waste when doing hand washed dishes by filling your sink with soapy water, washing the sink full of dishes, and then rinsing them all at once instead of washing and rinsing while the water is running.

If you are a dishwasher user, only run it when it's full to save water, and you can save energy by turning off the high-heat setting. When loading the dishwasher, put glasses and plastic on the top rack so that it lasts longer and won't have to be replaced as soon. (The heat of the water at the bottom of the machine is hotter and can break glass and warp or melt plastic.)

- Implement a compost process in your home to turn scraps of food into nutritious soil for your plants and garden. If you live in an apartment or smaller home, check out vermicompost—composting with worms is great for smaller spaces!

- Try out reusable covers instead of plastic wrap or aluminum foil to find your favorite alternative; some options include stretchy lids, silicone lids, and beeswax wraps (which you can even make yourself!). There are tons of tutorials online, and if you stay tuned, I'm hoping to start making and selling them. When I do, maybe I'll do a tutorial here in *Druid Magazine*!

- If you don't like the taste of your tap water, purchase a filtration system or water filter pitcher to improve the quality and taste instead of buying bottled water in disposable plastic bottles.

- Remember to use appropriate utensils and take good care of your kitchen tools so that they can last a lifetime:

  - Use only wood, plastic, or rubber utensils on your nonstick pans because metal scratches the surface, which decreases the effectiveness of the nonstick and can lead to the coating chipping off into your food—and it is NOT meant to be ingested.

  - Sharpen knives carefully (or bring them to a professional knife sharpener) and hand dry them immediately after washing, especially if they are hand-forged, as they are prone to rust.

- Cast iron pans are incredible to cook in, can be used for indoor or outdoor cooking, and can last for generations. Many people love using them (myself included), but there can be a steep learning curve to take care of them. Take time to read up on seasoning, washing, and general care—you won't regret it!

Paper

- Swap paper napkins for cloth ones. In addition to the simple pleasure of having pretty napkins around, I find cloth napkins wipe better than paper, they don't have to be washed after every use, they significantly cut down on paper waste, and they're oh so versatile! In addition to the classic use of napkins, I have used mine: as oven mitts in a time of desperation (folded up for thickness, of course), as a tissue/hankie, to soak up a spill, to wrap food that I was bringing on a picnic or to work for lunch, to wrap an icepack (I find a towel to filter too much of the cold for my liking), and in my most unique use… to cover my phone charging cable to hide it from my feisty kittens so they don't nibble it!

- In the age of technology, banking has been made so much easier. Enroll in online banking, online bill pay, and electronic statements. This leads to less mail in your mailbox, and less sensitive material that will need to be shredded down the line.

- When you can, utilize digital versions of your documents instead of printing them out. When you can't, make a point of printing double sided, or using the back of the sheets as scrap paper when you no longer need the original.

- Do you get a ton of junk mail that you don't care about? Make a project for yourself out of collecting it all and contacting the senders to unsubscribe you.

Out and About

- Travel with reusable silverware and straws so that you don't have to use disposables wherever you go. You can purchase adorable pre-made sets or you can simply bring some from home. I crocheted a little pouch to bring mine from home.

- Even if you don't bring your own, you can tell your servers, "no straw please!"

- Utilize a reusable water bottle and travel mug. You can bring your own beverage from home, or most places will fill it for you instead of using disposable nowadays—sometimes at discount!

- Bring your own container for your leftovers/ doggie bag when you eat out. Some people even bring their own containers when they order take out to be picked up.

Shopping

- Bring your own containers to the grocery store and buy in bulk if your store offers this. Many grocery stores offer grains, trail mix, herbs and spices, mixed greens, and even candy in bulk now. Depending on the container you use, you may want to go to the customer service desk and get the Tare Weight of it measured and marked on the container so that when you check out, you are just paying for the food, not the weight of the container. This isn't as big a deal with bagged items, but if you use a glass jar, or something weightier, it's worth it.

- Shop second hand. Do you really need everything you buy to be new? Thrift stores often have gently used items that work just as well as new—sometimes better! People are always saying how "they don't make things like they used to." By scouring (or as I prefer to refer to it… treasure hunting) tag sales, thrift stores, and re-sale websites like Craigslist, it's often possible to find a well-made, older version of something that will last longer than a new one and at a better price. All of my cast iron (and there’s a lot of it) was purchased second hand or given to me as a hand-me-down!

- On a similar note, donate, freecycle, or Craigslist goods when you no longer need or want them instead of tossing them into the trash. This is a great way to have your items rehomed and reused by another.

- Another easy way to keep things out of the landfill is to switch to rechargeable batteries. They are a bit of an investment initially, but last for a long time and ultimately save money, especially if you are an avid battery user.

- Clothing is a deep black hole of a topic that I’ll cover on its own down the line. But a great starting point is to make an effort to purchase clothing that is built to last and/or has an excellent warrantee. R.E.I., L.L. Bean, and Eddie Bauer are a few “mainstream” shops that have warrantees that go above and beyond. Just last week, I returned a solar charger to Eddie Bauer that I had purchased 2 years ago but had stopped working after about 4 months. I had been nervous about the return so had put it off, but when I got there, no questions asked, they swapped it out for me without blinking an eye and I now have a new one (and a few treasures from the clearance rack I found while they made the return)!

- When gift giving, you can reduce waste by choosing to give experiences, homemade food, or useful, usable items. For my nephew River’s second birthday, I kept this in mind and picked him up his first outdoor backpack from R.E.I., a stainless-steel water bottle, and then I filled the bag with organic snacks that he likes. He loved the snacks and still uses the backpack and water bottle regularly over a year later.

These are just a few of the countless ways that you can begin making efforts to Reduce and Reuse in your daily life. Whatever methods work for you, remember to have fun experimenting. It’s always fun to try new strategies or find ways to improve the ones that you have already implemented.

Are there ways you, as a Grove or Seed Group, can reduce your impact and improve the environment? Let us know what you’re doing as solitaires or as a community. Photos are very much welcomed!

Yours in mindful living,
Lolly

Lolly Nicol is a Bardic Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids who enjoys incorporating various spiritualities into her practice. She is often referred to by her non-OBOD peers as "a hippie, crunchy, earth mama." In her spare time she likes to craft; her latest endeavor is sewing reusable gift bags for the Holiday Season to sell at Maker's Markets and online.

HONEYSUCKLE SPEAKS

BY SARAH FUHRO

SOLSTICE EVENING

I hear you in the long grass

as light dims into gray mist.

And you are the strange sound:

No bird, no beast I know.

Like the twists in the path

I take you as you show yourself.

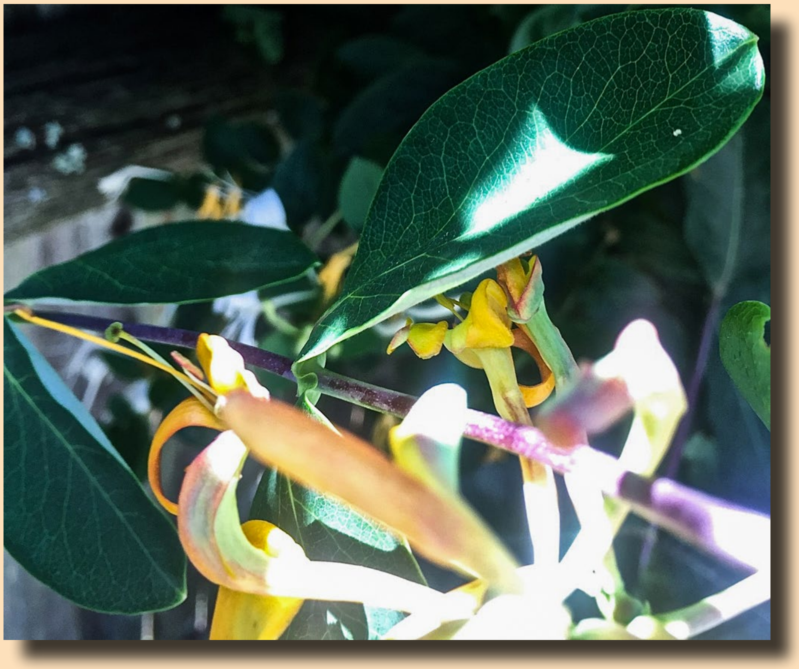
© Sarah Fuhro

On the night of the Grove Solstice celebration, we were drinking wine under the long reach of a Honeysuckle vine in my garden. And even though I have made a flower essence from Honeysuckle, and even though she is part of the Ogham Tree Alphabet, it was as if I had lost all contact with this good friend! When asked if she had a sacred energy, I said lightly, "Oh, I use Trumpet Vine with people who need help to speak up. That's a kind of Honeysuckle!"

Later that night in bed, just as I was going to sleep, I had a visitor: "Uilleand!" said the voice, "I am Uilleand! How did you forget me? Because that is how I work, appear and then disappear in a spiral. I am the Hidden Treasure who disappears when you are distracted!"

And there she was in dream form in front of my dream eyes! She was transparent just as in this picture (see photo). She twisted round to show me how she is connected to the labyrinth that was built by Grove members in my garden and which has become a theme in my pottery over the last year. She reminded me of clients who had benefitted from her essence.

She will lead us to a *hidden secret* that belongs to us, but only if we can focus on that journey and not become distracted by the allure around us. Her bird is the Lapwing who does love to distract us from the nest by strange pretense of damage.



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Somewhere in the apple
we call the human heart,
in the soft place,
next to the crisp place,
is a tiny star.
a star, which is the start,
of a long love story.

So Honeysuckle must be related to astrology, which also speaks to us of our *hidden secret*, but it may take a long time to get close to the treasure because of the diversions along the way. I began a serious study of astrology at the same time I entered the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) in 1990. I followed the spiral path of Druidry and astrology as best I could despite all the distractions of life. But why speak in the past tense? I am yet a student of Druidry and astrology and am still easily led astray in many directions!

Druidry arrived for me in the form of a seminar by (OBOD Chosen Chief) Philip Carr-Gomm. I signed up because I was teaching tarot classes where I used guided visualization. *The Druid Way* class description said "Guided Visualization," and I longed to be led into new territory.

And so my story began. Druidry gave my astrology a community context. Early on, I went to a Druid retreat in Derbyshire where four of us were astrologers: one English, one Dutch, one Polish, and American me! Four Druid astrologers wander the countryside together! We cast everyone's chart at the retreat and quickly discovered a few astrological markers that indicated an interest in Druidry. Needless to say, the Earth element was essential, except for three people who were musicians and had

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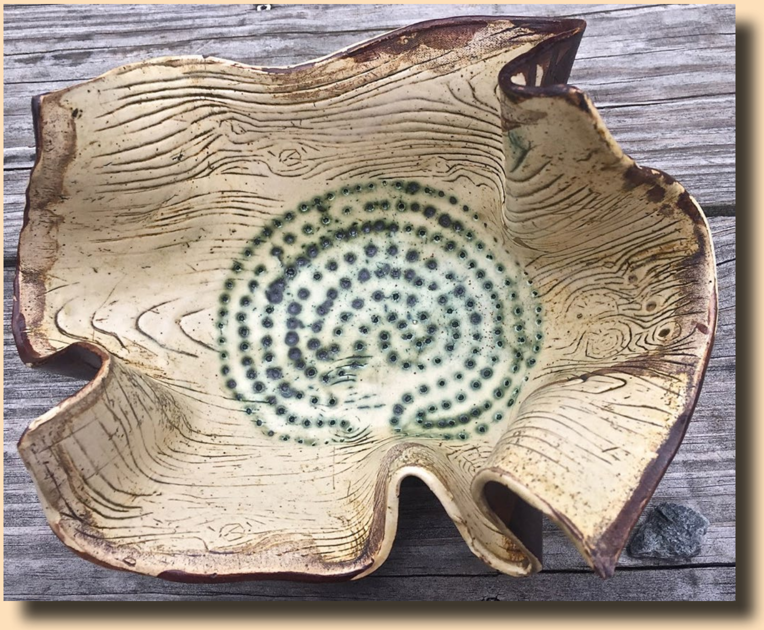
little or no Earth in their makeup! Later, I wrote the astrological lessons for the OBOD course with a special challenge built into the structure.

As I finished the Druid grade in 2000, I realized I needed to add flower essences to my work with astrology clients. I learned to make and use essences: the energetic pattern of plants. Druidry gives me the ear to hear what plants have to say. The work we do as Druids weaves us into the natural world. I hear my plants, the stars, and my clients with an ear trained through a tradition—vital, yet ancient. I wrote an article about this connection published in *The Mountain Astrologer* titled, "A Druid Looks at Plants and Planets."

Druidry winds through my life like the Honeysuckle vine. It weaves my deep connection to Nature, to dreams, to political activism, to mythology, to women's spirituality, and through my art work. In the last few years, I have returned to clay and pottery. In everything I do, Druidry is there—the eternal and ever-changing mystery behind my material and spiritual outlook on the world.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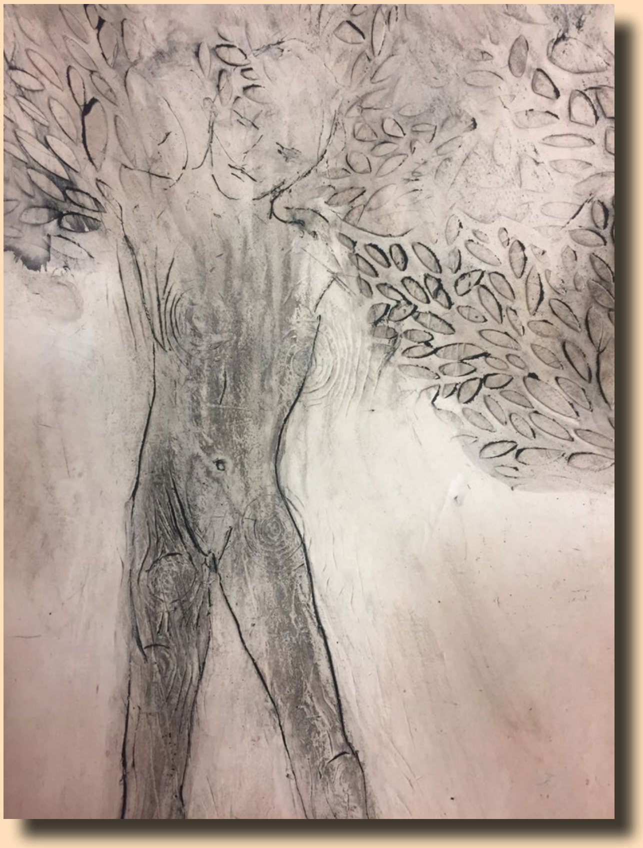
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I cannot imagine my life without the thread of Druidry woven through it. My life as Druid integrates my life as astrologer, flower essence practitioner, artist, Tarot reader, and teacher. As I follow the cycles of the year and the Moon, I am soothed. As Grove member, I celebrate with an ever-changing family. I have Druid ears to hear and recognize the language of plants, stars, clay, and paper. I recognize myself as tree with many leaves.

Reference

Fuhro, S. (2006, April). A Druid's look at plants and planets. *The Mountain Astrologer*. Retrieved online at http://www.sarahfuhro.com/articles/DruidLooksAtPlantsandPlanets.pdf

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EISTEDDFOD

Resistance and the Story

By Gail Nyoka

In a fictitious West African nation—perhaps rather like the native Nigeria of the late Chinua Achebe—a dictator comes to power.

An elder, part of a delegation from a poor province, has come to the capital to address the dictator. The delegation is denied an audience with "His Excellency," but later, at a gathering in a hotel courtyard, the elder tells a story: *The Tortoise and the Leopard*. The leopard has been lying in wait for the tortoise, but allows the tortoise a moment before being killed. To the leopard's amazement, the tortoise runs back and forth across the dirt road, jumping around and stirring up the ground. When he has finished, the tortoise tells the leopard that even though he will be killed, others will come across this place in the road and know that he, the tortoise, had put up a valiant fight against the oppressor, and that even though he lost the battle, this struggle will be remembered, giving them courage.

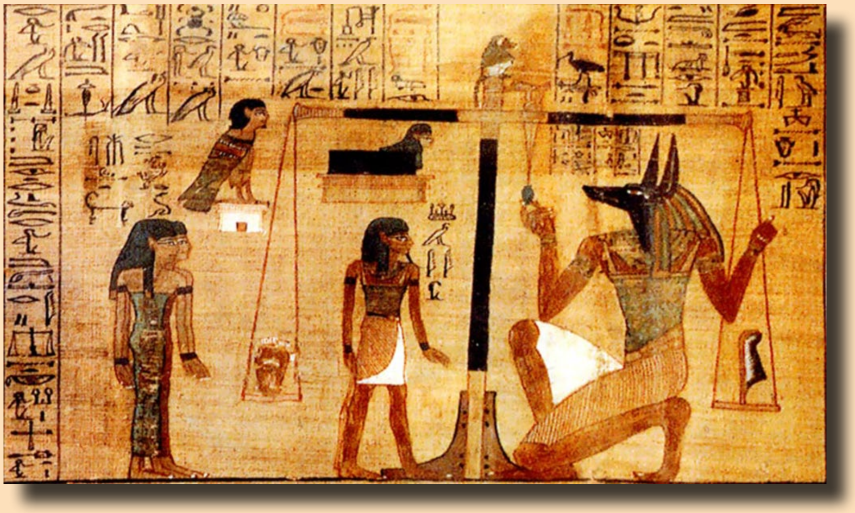
The elder, the teller of this tale, gives his opinion on three groups of people necessary in any struggle against an oppressor: the war drummer who sounds the battle cry that lets everyone know that they must prepare for the necessity of the fight; the warrior who conducts the fight; and the storyteller who tells what has transpired. "I tell you there is not one of them we could do without," he said (Achebe, 1987, p.113).

The role of the storyteller, this elder argues, must never be underestimated for, "it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior…The story is our escort, without it, we are blind" (Achebe, p.114).

Tyrants fear the story as much as they fear the sword, as we see when attempts are made to disparage and discredit the story and its tellers. Books are banned, journalists and writers are imprisoned or killed. But the story is not owned by one teller, and so it lives, as long as there are tongues to tell it.

"When we are young and without experience," says the elder, "we all imagine that the story of the land is easy, that every one of us can get up and tell it. But that is not so."

To be a keeper of the story is a responsibility, an honored role in traditional societies. The teller must become the story, and the story is beholden to a greater truth. You will find that this holds even in fictional tales. There is a traditional Irish storytelling poem:



The dreamer awakes,
The shadow goes by;
When I tell you a tale,
The tale is a lie.
But ponder it well,
Fair maiden, good youth:
The tale is a lie,
What it tells is the truth
(Kane, 1995, p. 9)

The story can be allegorical, or it can relate to events that have taken place in time as we know it. What is important in every story is that it tells the truth. The truth goes beyond convenience, prejudice, and what may be politically expedient—it speaks to the core of what lies within the heart. In ancient Egypt, the heart was weighed against the feather of Ma'at, the embodiment of Truth. The heart of the deceased, if truthful, weighs no more than the feather.

As we consider our role as part of resistance, we know that it can take many forms: We may be the ones who sound the warning and strike the battle drum, we may be the warriors who put our bodies into the struggle, or we may be the storytellers. And we remember the importance of knowledge. We know that the knowledge contained within the story makes us powerful. We know that it can live for generations. We make sure that what our story tells is the truth.

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Kane, A. (1995). *The Dreamer Awakes*. Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press.

Gail Nyoka is a Druid member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. She is a storyteller, playwright, and author, living in Ohio. Her new young adult novel, Star's Reflection, is set, in part, in a temple in Ancient Egypt; and is now available as an audiobook.

A BARD'S PRAYER

BY AVELLINA BALESTRI

Let me catch the flame

Golden, glittering, glaring

So my fingers may glow as I hold the pen

Let me taste the wine

Sweet, smooth, sumptuous

So my speech may be seasoned when I tell the tale

Let my arrow fly

Straight-shot, shimmering, shocking

To cleave each heart for the sake of truth

Let my harp strings sound

Merry, moaning, murmuring

So all may partake in the moods of life

Let me smooth the cloth

Crumpled, crude, queer-colored,

So beauty and grace may greet each eye

Let me weave with thread

Silver, star-lit, spider-spun

So my words may flow like a moon-kissed stream

Let me feel the drum

Pulsing, pounding, puncturing

So my voice may serve as a battle-horn

Let my cry be heard

Ringing, roaring, raging

Above the din of battle and through the soul

Let me glimpse the ghosts

Fast-footed, fair-faced, fleeting

So my blessing may reach them as eyes meet eyes

Let me climb the chain

Twinkling, taught, tenacious

That connects the present with the haunted past

Let me harvest jewels

Unicorn-horns, sword-hilts, Christ's hem

And lay them out in story and song

Let it so be done

Soulfully, sacrificially, sanctifyingly

So that life may infuse death-darkened eyes

Avellina Balestri (aka Rosaria Marie) is a freelance writer whose musings on matters of world history, popular culture, current events, and universal spirituality have been featured in over 25 magazines. She is also the editor-in-chief of The Fellowship of The King, an online magazine exploring the arts through a spiritual lens.

THE SONG THAT NEVER SLEEPS

BY AVELLINA BALESTRI

We will remember

The "failures"

The "losers"

The "rejects"

Who dared to be more

Than others allowed

In the smallness of their minds

Victory in failure

Forever holds true

If met with the sword

Of steel-blue intent

And the sparks

Of blood-red passion

Yield and overcome

Songs can never die

Nor do beliefs

Sincerely held

That prove to be

Of lasting worth

Let the small birds
Give chase to the hawks
Let the acorns
Sprout into oaks
Let the wood
Make bows for arrows
And the feathers
Straight-shot shafts
Let them sing
The rebel song
That never sleeps
Whistling through the air,
Blowing in the wind...
Outlaw Prince,
In forest or in moor,
We will hide you
In our hearts
A shadowy reflection
Of a Greater Prince
Undone for our souls
A «Fool on a Hill»
Whose challenge lives
In every breath we take
Rise up, Mockingjay,
Some fires never die
Some waters never dry
And the Land of Dreams,

Of Avalon's silver branches

With sap of amber

And nuts of wisdom,

Need never sleep

Let them mark us out

As "failures"

As "losers"

As "rejects"

And we will stand firm

With hands joined

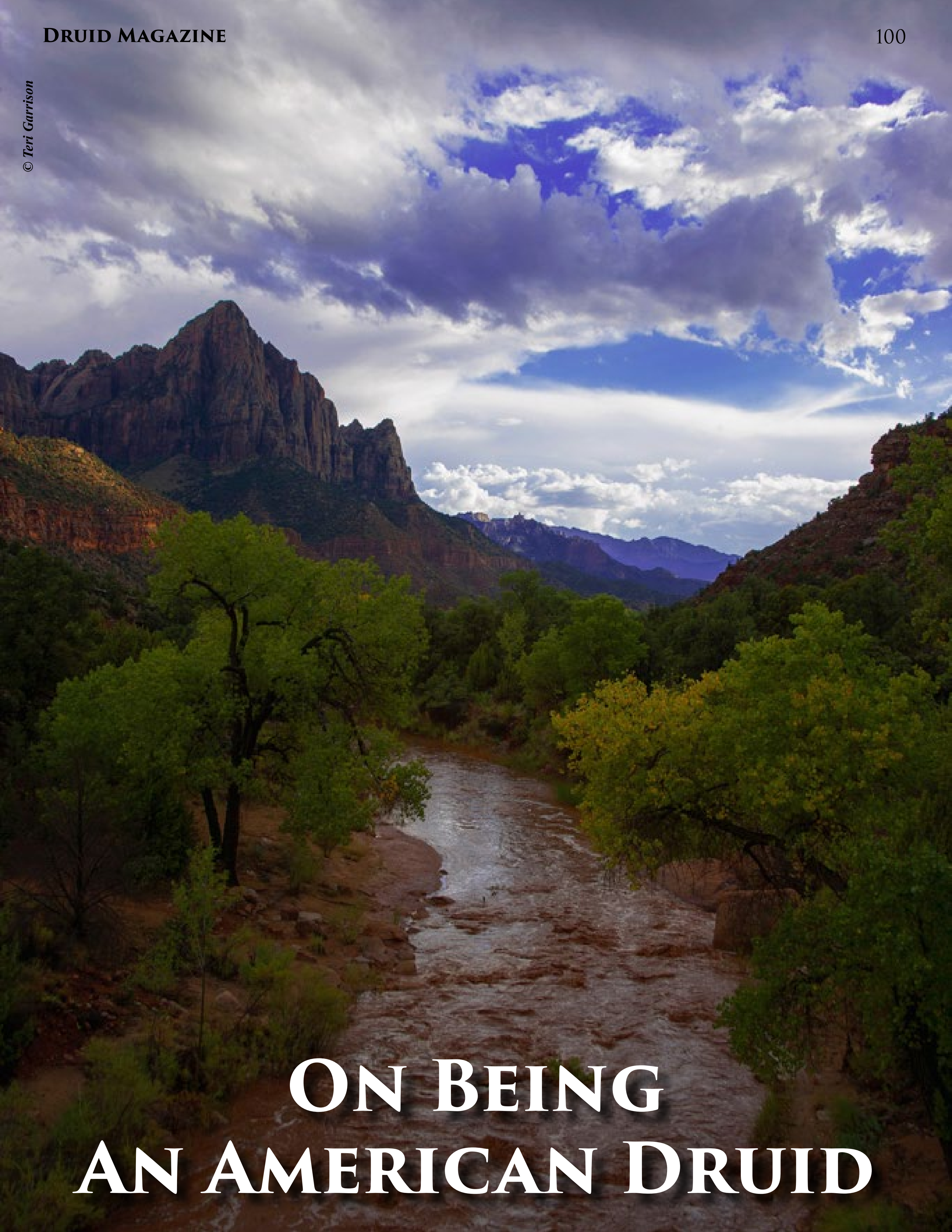
Let our crosses

Dot the hills

For every seed planted

Must first die

And then emerge



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On Being An American Druid

THE AWAKENING OF A MID-ATLANTIC DRUID

BY AMBROSE

One week after my 18th birthday, I got in my car and drove nearly 1,500 miles to Los Angeles. I was all set to begin studying Anthropology at the University of Southern California, but I was in a great rush to be an adult and couldn't wait until the beginning of the Fall semester to leave home.

I spent that first summer in LA pleasantly enough. I painted home exteriors for rent money and did a lot of reading. I still hadn't gotten laid, but I figured that would happen after school started, so I tried to keep my cool. I spent an enormous amount of time at the beach. I'd like to say I was getting acquainted with the Pacific Ocean, but that didn't happen on any deep level until much later.

The semester started on time, as they usually do, and I was a solid student. I even made a few friends and moved into a group house near campus—a big, creaking Craftsman home from the 1930s with a huge backyard and excellent exposure for a vegetable garden, which I immediately installed (the growing season in LA is kind of year-round). My roommates threw spectacular parties. I finally had sex and got high for the first time. But I still wasn't happy. No matter how many boxes I checked off of my list of desires, I wasn't fulfilled.

Toward the end of my first semester, I called my grandmother and told her I wanted to come home. I said, "There aren't any ghosts here in LA. I miss Texas thunderstorms." She paused a long while, then said, "Well, Precious (that's what she always called me), you are welcome to come home, but you should know that wherever you live, there you are." It took me 20 years to understand what she meant. My grandfather, a very practical Capricorn, and not at all inclined to mystical, poetic, or philosophical arguments said simply, "Stay one more semester. If you're still unhappy, come home."

So I stayed.

Of course, I soon discovered that there *are* ghosts in LA—a lot of them—and the Santa Ana winds, the boisterous Pacific surf, and the Northridge earthquake a couple of years later reminded me that thunderstorms and cottonwood trees aren't the only music the Earth makes. What I had lacked was *attunement*. I'd spent most of my life in one place. The spirits of the Texas plains knew me and kept me. They keep me to this day whenever I return there, drawing me into their embrace like a family reunion. I just needed time to get to know my new Land and for it to know me.

This realization lies at the heart of what I think it means to be an American Druid. Americans tend to cultivate an overweening sense of their heritage as an immigrant culture. This diversity is a virtue to be sure, but it is hardly unique or even rare. Canada, India, and Argentina come immediately to mind as nations with diverse cultural resources.

Pride in one's nationality has always struck me as lacking a point, like being proud of one's date of birth. Or being born in the west wing of a hospital, not the east. The borders may be historical, but are, for the most part, arbitrary. Additionally, we often use the words pride and love interchangeably. The conflation is at best silly, and at worst damaging and divisive. Pride of country feeds the ego primarily and has its source in the accomplishments of the past—the hard work of ancestors. When one loves a Land, however, one works for its current and future wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of the creatures who live (and lived) on the Land.

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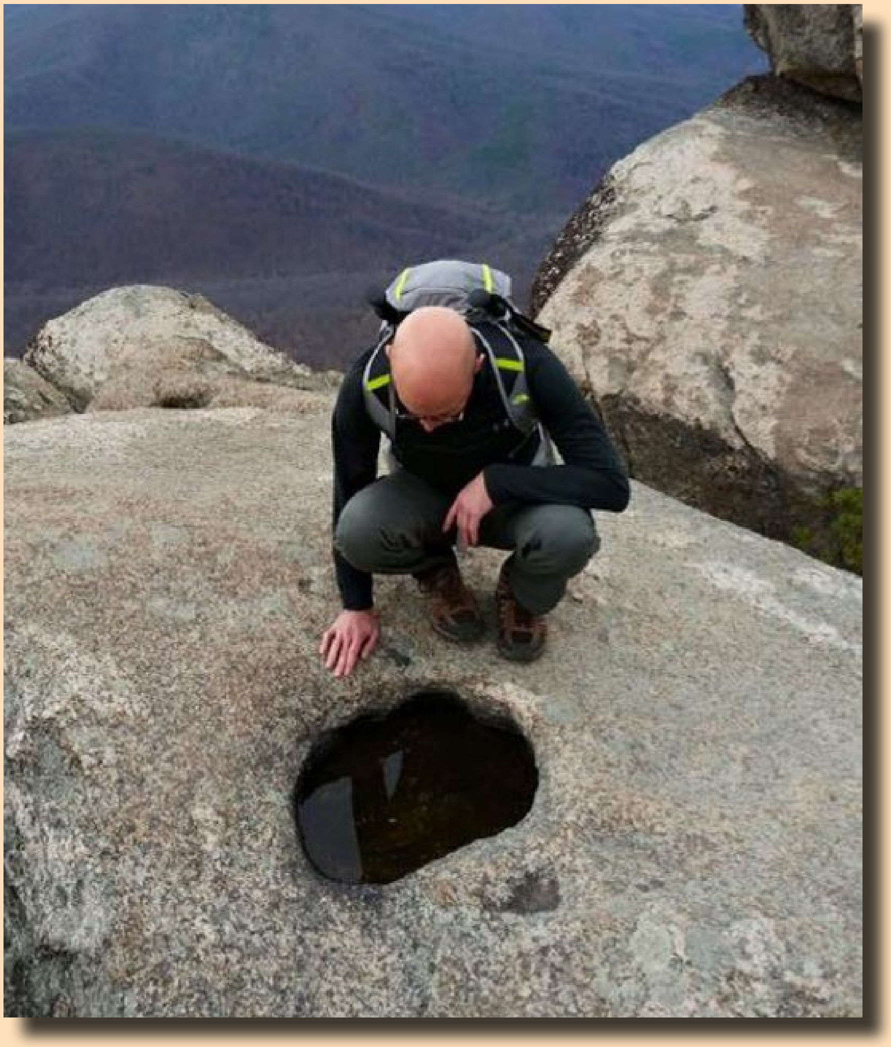
The problem is that the United States (and Canada, India, and Argentina, among others) is not only culturally diverse but physically vast. In a world where one can experience a relationship with the spirits of Albion and understand their distinct character from the spirits of Spain or Norway or even Ireland, it makes very little sense to think of America in monolithically spiritual terms. American Druids are necessarily a diverse lot because their eco-spiritual contexts are so varied.

I never fell in love with Southern California, but I did build a good life there and had many adventures. I would even say I achieved some level of attunement with the spirits of that Land, although at an unconscious level. In 2001, I moved to Washington, DC to go to graduate school. The natural setting of the Mid-Atlantic could not be more different from that of Los Angeles or of my native Texas for that matter. However, I was almost immediately in love.



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I consider myself a Druid of the Mid-Atlantic bioregion. I've now lived in the Mid-Atlantic longer than I've lived anywhere else, and my residence here has been co-extensive with my awakening as a Druid. I know its plants, geography, history, and culture better than that of any other region.

I have a distinct memory of gaping in awe at the deep summer green of the woods the first time I rode along George Washington Memorial Parkway. The big, scaly Elms in my neighborhood in DC have weathered more than a century of plague, fire, riots, recessions, intrigues, and impeachments, but still manage to sing mirthfully at dusk and kick up the bricks along East Capitol Street while sleepless Congressional staffers pace beneath their branches. The woods of the Shenandoah Valley are full of poison ivy, black bears, copperheads, and ticks. And I love them for it. I've hiked the woods and mountains of this Land to exhaustion. I've slept on cold ground without a tent. I've meditated in rivers and offered tobacco at the tops of mountains. Every day I hear the spirits calling me into the wild or into a garden to play and learn. Every day I feel as though this Land were the Teacher I've sought out my entire life.

As I said, I've fallen in love with this Land. And like a lover, I live to serve, heal, and protect her. This zeal does not preclude the possibility that I might love another—that circumstance may part us—but I know now what it truly means to love a Land. Wherever this Druid finds himself, the Land will find an ally.

So I suppose what I'm saying is that it took America's diverse bioregions to teach me that a Druid's connection to the Land is not historical, political, or genetic. It is a choice to engage and listen. I don't say this simply to counter Nationalist rhetoric that has become more common in some Pagan circles. I say it because I believe it is our magical birthright as humans—the one animal species with the widest range of movement and the most dangerous and fantastic of capacities—to relate to the spirits of any Land.

And relate to them, we must. I am inspired and awed by the stories of Ceridwen and Taliesin (and other Celtic tales). They contain within them every bit of wisdom claimed by the gwersi. However, I believe it is also important to read and hear the tales and poems of the Land in which you live, such as the tale of *Coyote and Bear* from the Pawnee in Oklahoma*. In the Mid-Atlantic, stories of the Lenape, Pocomoke, and Rappahanock peoples. And stories of Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, The Jackalope, and the Maid of the Mist. We must listen to these local stories, because they introduce us to the spirits of a place. Read American poets who are in love with the Land, and you will know everything you need to know—Mary Oliver, Gary Snyder, Robinson Jeffers, and of course all of the Transcendentalists. Then forget the Americans! Who wrote more movingly about the wilds of the American West than the Scotsman John Muir? I can think of no better introduction to the spirits of America's bioregions than its writers and artists.

We are in the place. The place is not in us. Others who have written for this section of *Druid Magazine* have also said they feel more comfortable with the label "A Druid in America" rather than "American Druid," and I concur.

In the knowledge of a Land, grows the love of it.

When I think about what it means to be an American Druid, *love* is the first word that comes to mind. I love my Land practically to bursting. I love the Eastern shore of Maryland, at the edge of the Great Cypress Swamp, where the hawks hunt above the black waters of the Pocomoke River. I love the Blue Ridge Mountains and the human settlements that dot its valleys. I love the rock scrambles of Old Rag Mountain. On a day after a heavy rain you can find perfect scrying pools pitting the summit. I love the banks of wild raspberries and

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blueberries on the trail at Wolf Gap, a boon to every Midsummer hiker. I love the herons and crows of the muddy, green Monocacy River. I love the mugwort and mallow flourishing in my garden. I love the robin who keeps trying to build her nest in the transom window of my front door. And I love the craft of my fellow humans, too, because we are one of the most interesting of animals.

I often wonder about the first human shamans who made the cold and hungry crossing into The Americas. Did they know they were in a vast new land with its own spirits and its stories yet untold by human tongues? Did they attune immediately, or did that relationship take generations to develop? Did they possess the wisdom of my grandmother? *Wherever you live, there you are...*

** Regarding the stories of Bear and Coyote, I do not refer to a specific one. I heard many when I was a Boy Scout in North Central Texas, so they were certainly from the Pawnee (and Comanche) treasury of folk tales. But there are many tales with these two favorite characters of mine and many variations on the same tale. Here is a published source for some of them: Dorset, G. A. (1906). The Pawnee: mythology (part I). Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington.*

Ambrose is an Ovate grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids who lives in Washington, DC. In addition to being the lead organizer for the seed group of the Oak and Eagle, he is a professional gardener and constant hiker.

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